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An Historical Analysis of the Word of Wisdom

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AN HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE WORD OF WISDOM

A Thesis

Presented to the

Department of History

Brigham Young University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

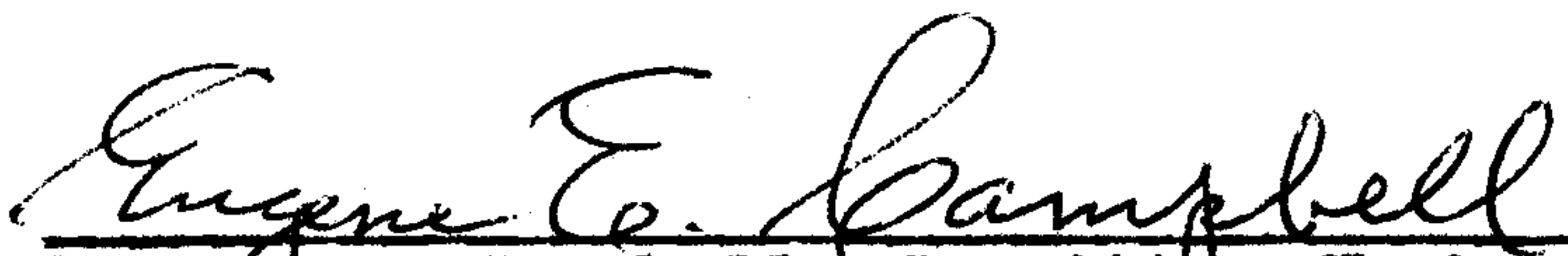
Master of Arts


by

Paul H. Peterson

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This thesis, by Paul H. Peterson, is accepted in its present form by the Department of History of Brigham Young University as satisfying the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.


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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. THE ORIGINS OF THE WORD OF WISDOM	6
The Early Nineteenth Century Temperance Movement	6
The Health Reform Movement	14
Variant Explanations of the Origin of the Word of Wisdom	17
III. A TIME OF TRIAL AND MODERATION: THE FIRST DECADE OF THE WORD OF WISDOM	22
The Move to Nauvoo	31
Joseph Smith's Personal Approach	36
IV. NOT BY COMMANDMENT OR CONSTRAINT	42
V. A PERIOD OF ECONOMIC ADJUSTMENT	54
VI. AN ERA OF REPENTANCE AND REFORM: THE WORD OF WISDOM IN THE EIGHTIES AND NINETIES	69
VII. THE WORD OF WISDOM AND THE ADOPTION OF PROHIBITION	82
VIII. THE WORD OF WISDOM: A STANDARD OF CHURCH ORTHODOXY	90
IX. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS	104
BIBLIOGRAPHY	109

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The "Word of Wisdom" comprises Section 89 of the Doctrine and Covenants, and is accepted as scripture by members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, as are the rest of the revelations contained in this volume.¹ It was first announced by Joseph Smith on February 27, 1833 at Kirtland, Ohio. The name of the revelation is taken from the first verse which reads: "A Word of Wisdom, for the benefit of the council of high priests, assembled in Kirtland, and the Church, and also the saints in Zion." The revelation can be logically broken down into six main divisions:

1. It is not good to drink wine or strong drink except for sacramental purposes. When used in the sacrament the wine must be "pure wine of the grape of the vine."
2. Tobacco is not good for man.
3. Hot drinks are not good for man. (hot drinks

¹The Doctrine and Covenants (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1952), section 89. In objective historical writing all revelations should be dealt with by using qualifying adjectives. To facilitate reading, the use of such adjectives has been avoided. This does not mean of course, that historical proof beyond refutation is in the possession of the author.

are interpreted by Church leaders to mean tea and coffee).

4. Herbs and fruits are "ordained for the constitution, nature, and use of man." They are to be used with prudence.

5. The flesh of beasts and fowls is to be used sparingly by man.

6. "All grain is ordained for the use of man and of beasts, to be the staff of life . . ."

The revelation was a "greeting" rather than a "commandment" but showed "forth the order and will of God in the temperal salvation of all saints in the last days."² Those who obey admonitions are promised that they will receive health and strength, find wisdom and great treasures of knowledge, run and not be weary, walk and not faint, and escape the destroying angel who will not slay them.

Although the revelation contains much of a positive nature, this study will be confined to those verses which prohibit the use of alcohol, tobacco, tea, and coffee. Church leaders generally have chosen to place emphasis in this area and abstinence from these items has been made a test of Church fellowship. To almost all Mormons, adherence to the Word of Wisdom

²The fact that it was not given as a literal commandment has caused considerable controversy and this will be examined in a latter chapter.

implies such abstinence.

Interpretations, stresses, and attitudes regarding this aspect of Mormonism have fluctuated and changed over the years. Today the revelation has literally become a badge of distinction for members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and Mormons everywhere are known for adherence to this doctrine. Nearly every recent non-Mormon writer who has written of Mormon society has made note of the practice among Church members.³

The purpose of this thesis is to trace the historical development of the Word of Wisdom and determine its influence (both past and present) on the lives of Latter-day Saints. Many articles, pamphlets, and books have been written in support of the health code which the revelation advocates⁴ but with two exceptions,

³See for example, the following accounts written by non-Mormon visitors: Thomas F. O'Lea, The Mormons (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), pp. 144-146; William J. Whalen, The Latter-day Saints in the Modern Day World (New York: John Day Co., 1964), pp. 221-228; Robert Mullen, The Latter-day Saints (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1966), pp. 26-27; Wallace Turner, The Mormon Establishment (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1966), pp. 54-55.

⁴The most prominent works of this nature are: Frederick J. Pack, Tobacco and Human Efficiency (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1919); L. Weston Oaks, Medical Aspects of the Latter-day Saint Word of Wisdom (Provo: Brigham Young University, 1929); John A. and Leah D. Widtsoe, The Word of Wisdom, A Modern Interpretation (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1950); David Geddes, Our Word of Wisdom (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1964).

no one has attempted to trace its development historically. Leonard J. Arrington wrote a short but perceptive paper which stressed the importance of economic factors in Utah during the 1860's as one reason for stressing the Word of Wisdom then.⁵ David Geddes included a brief chapter on the historical background of the revelation in a book that was primarily concerned with the health aspects of the doctrine.⁶ Thus the need for this study becomes readily apparent. It is hoped that such an effort will dispel many prominent myths about the Word of Wisdom and by separating truth from error, make more clear a sensitive phase of Mormon history that has never been adequately examined.

The approach is chronological. Chapter two discusses the prevailing environment in which the revelation was given and examines various explanations of its origin. The remaining chapters examine the interpretations and applications of the principle beginning with the administration of Joseph Smith and concluding with present Church policies.

The writer has obtained his materials primarily from published speeches of Mormon leaders, minutes of

⁵ Leonard J. Arrington, "An Economic Interpretation of the Word of Wisdom," Brigham Young University Studies, Vol. 1 (Winter, 1959), pp. 37-49.

⁶ David Geddes, Our Word of Wisdom (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1964).

important Latter-day Saint meetings, Mormon diaries, journals, and letters, accounts of non-Mormons who lived and traveled among Church members, and contemporary newspapers and periodicals. By structure the Mormon church is strongly authoritarian and because of this a good deal of emphasis has been placed on learning the attitudes of Church leaders toward this doctrine.

In this thesis, the words "Church," "Mormon," and "Saint" will be used interchangeably and will refer to members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The word, "Gentile," will refer to nonmembers of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

CHAPTER II

THE ORIGINS OF THE WORD OF WISDOM

The Early Nineteenth Century Temperance Movement

In early nineteenth century American communities, liquor-drinking was common and widespread. It was estimated that the consumption of spirits in 1792 was two and a half gallons per person per year. By 1810 the figure had reached four and a half gallons, and in 1823, seven and a half gallons.¹ Liquor was a common table beverage in most homes and a universal mark of hospitality. At almost any kind of gathering, business or social, custom demanded that drink be provided.² The spirit of a drinking nation is vividly reflected in Horace Greeley's recollection of boyhood days in Vermont:

In my childhood there was no merry-making, there was no entertainment of relatives or friends, there was scarcely a casual gathering of two or three neighbors for an evening's social chat, without strong drink. Cider always, while it remained drinkable without severe contortion of visage; rum at seasons and on all occasions, were required and provided. No house or barn was raised without a bountiful supply of the latter and generally of both. A wedding without "toddy," "flip," "sling," or "punch," with rum undisguised in abundance, would

¹ Alice Felt Tyler, Freedom's Ferment, (New York: Harper and Row, 1944), p. 312.

² August F. Fehlandt, A Century of Drink Reform in the U.S. (Cincinnati: Jennings and Graham, 1904), pp. 19-20.

have been deemed a poor, mean affair, even among the penniless; while the more thrifty or course dispensed wine, brandy, and gin in profusion. Dancing--almost the only pasttime wherein the sexes jointly participated--was always enlivened and stimulated by liquor. Militia training--then rigidly enforced at least twice a year--usually wound up with a drinking frolic at the village tavern. Election days were drinking days . . . and even funerals were regarded as inadequately celebrated without the dispensing of spirituous consolation.³

Naturally the common and almost unrestrained use of "ardent spirits" led to widespread intemperance, and various reformers voiced concern over increasing evils wrought by strong drink. From the time of the American Revolution until 1815, Benjamin Rush was the central figure among temperance agitators, and his Inquiry Into the Effect of Ardent Spirits upon the Human Mind and Body went through eight editions.⁴ Eventually the movement was supported by Christian leaders, and temperance reform became inseparably connected with the spread of revivalistic religion.⁵ Many churchgoers came to view drinking as inconsistent with Christian tenets as well as an indication of moral depravity. Prior to this time the movement was characterized by philanthropic concerns rather than moral convictions, and thus lacked the zealous spirit that was apparently necessary to bring

³Tyler, Freedom's Ferment, p. 310, citing Horace Greeley, Recollections, pp. 99-100.

⁴Ibid., p. 314.

⁵Ernest H. Cherrington, The Evolution of Prohibition in the United States of America (Westerville Ohio: American Issue Press, 1920), pp. 74-75.

about more positive results.⁶

The creation of the American Temperance Society in 1826 marked the beginning of organized temperance groups, and inaugurated a movement which had far-reaching consequences. Almost immediately hundreds of state and local auxiliaries sprang into existence, and within a year after the organization of the American Temperance Society, 222 local groups had been formed in sixteen states. By 1831, state organizations had been established in all but five states, and 2,200 local societies had been organized with a membership approximating 170,000. Two years later the number of local organizations had increased to 5,000 with a total membership of 1,250,000.⁷ By 1830, throughout the nation, "more than fifty distilleries had been stopped; more than four hundred merchants had renounced the traffic; and more than twelve hundred drunkards had ceased to use the drunkard's drink."⁸ Individual states also produced statistics which indicated that liquor traffic was losing the respectability of former times.⁹

Prior to the early 1830's many societies carefully

⁶ John A. Krout, The Origins of Prohibition (New York: Russell and Russell, 1925), p. 100.

⁷ Cherrington, The Evolution of Prohibition, p. 93.

⁸ Danial Dorchester, The Liquor Problem in All Ages (New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1884), p. 236.

⁹ Krout, The Origins of Prohibition, p. 143.

distinguished between distilled spirits and other alcoholic beverages and there were relatively few prohibitions regarding beer, wine, and cider.¹⁰ By 1836, opposition to this "liberal" interpretation had arisen, and many local societies adopted constitutions which required abstinence from all intoxicating liquors.¹¹ This diversity of opinion eventually resulted in a cleavage, with one group demanding total abstinence, advocating prohibition, and condemning producers and retailers as well as drinkers, where the other opposed any pledge of abstinence and simply urged a moderate approach toward intoxicating drinks. The split created by this issue plus the tendency of Southern temperance leaders to identify some of the Northern agitators with the abolition movement contributed to a decline in temperance interest and enthusiasm by the late 1830's.¹²

The people of the state of Ohio participated in and were directly affected by the temperance movement. As in other frontier states, addiction to liquor was not uncommon prior to 1830.¹³ As a commodity, whiskey was

¹⁰Dorchester, The Liquor Problem, p. 236; Krout, The Origins of Prohibition, pp. 156-157.

¹¹Krout, The Origins of Prohibition, pp. 156-157.

¹²Tyler, Freedom's Ferment, pp. 327-329.

¹³Francis P. Weisenburger, The History of the State of Ohio, Vol. III, The Passing of the Frontier 1824-1850 (Columbus: Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Society, 1941), p. 126.

produced on numerous farms and could be purchased for 15 to 25 cents a gallon.¹⁴ James Finley, the Methodist revivalist, noted as he rode his circuit in Ohio that not only was alcohol used as a disease preventative, but that it "was also regarded as a necessary beverage. A house could not be raised, a field of wheat cut down, nor could there be a log rolling, a husking, a quilting, a wedding, or a funeral without the aid of alcohol."¹⁵ Nearly all classes of people were given to drinking, ministers not excepted. One ex-senator indicated in 1837 that he had been for several years the last survivor of nine resident lawyers in Cincinnati in 1796, all the rest having become drunkards and dying early.¹⁶ Another member of the legal profession complained that the vast majority of bar members were slaves to the vice of drinking.¹⁷ Public intoxication was prevalent and it was not uncommon to see women drinking freely.¹⁸

Such undesirable conditions were somewhat alleviated

¹⁴R. Carlyle Buley, "Glimpses of Pioneer Mid-West Social and Cultural History," The Mississippi Valley Historical Review, Vol. 23, (March, 1937), pp. 496-497.

¹⁵Tyler, Freedom's Ferment, pp. 310-311, citing James Finley, Autobiography, p. 248.

¹⁶Weisenburger, The Passing of the Frontier, p. 127, citing Jacob Burnet, "Letters," Historical and Philosophical Society of Ohio, Transactions (Cincinnati), Vol. I, (1839), p. 13.

¹⁷Buley, "Glimpses of Pioneer History," p. 496.

¹⁸Ibid.

in the early 1830's when a flurry of temperance reform appeared. As in other areas, the churches became the leading vehicles for temperance expression with the evangelical denominations in the forefront.¹⁹ Shaker societies in Ohio, a sect familiar to many Mormons, appear to have opposed the drinking of intoxicants early.²⁰ However, the movement was not strictly sectarian in nature. Several distinguished citizens spearheaded the crusades, among them Governor Robert Lucas, a leader of Ohio's temperance society from 1832 to 1836.²¹

The "hot-bed" for temperance reform in Ohio was the Western Reserve area, with approximately one-quarter of the total temperance societies in the state located there.²² The Reserve was the scene of an "ultra-radical religious element," whose churches quickly incorporated the movement within the area of moral reform and regulation.²³ Reverend Edward Brown, an Oberlin, Ohio resident,

¹⁹Weisenburger, The Passing of the Frontier, pp. 161-163.

²⁰Charles Nordhoff, The Communistic Societies of the United States (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1875), p. 215.

²¹Krout, The Origins of Prohibition, p. 136.

²²Ibid., p. 130. The northeast section of Ohio is known as the Western Reserve. During the period of Mormon residency, it was occupied largely by people of New England origin.

²³Alfred Mathews, Ohio and Her Western Reserve (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1902, p. 130.

noted that by the early 1830's, "raisings [construction of buildings] without whisky soon became the rule instead of the exception in that part of Ohio."²⁴

Some schools were also organized and conducted on temperance principles in this period. By 1832 Kenyon College reported a temperance society of 167 members,²⁵ while Oberlin College, founded shortly afterward by Congregationalists, laid its governing foundations on temperance principles.²⁶ D. Griffiths, a temporary settler in the region observed the changes wrought by the crusade and noted that many distillery houses closed down while numerous merchants gave up the sale of ardent spirits. "The inhabitants in general," said Griffiths, "who have much regard to their reputation practice total abstinence."²⁷

Newspapers helped to spread temperance reforms by publishing long articles and providing editorial comment on the movement.²⁸ The Painesville Telegraph,

²⁴ Justus Newton Brown, "Temperance and Church-Building in Pioneer Days on the Western Reserve," Ohio Historical Quarterly, Vol. 28, (April, 1919), p. 253.

²⁵ Wyman W. Parker, "Edwin M. Stanton at Kenyon," The Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Quarterly, Vol. 60, (July, 1951), p. 238.

²⁶ Krout, The Origins of Prohibition, p. 148.

²⁷ D. Griffiths, Residence in the New Settlements of Ohio (London: Westley and Davis, 1835), pp. 129-130.

²⁸ Buley, "Glimpses of Pioneer History," p. 497.

a Gaeuga County publication that was probably read by many of the Saints, proved no exception, as it frequently issued warnings against intemperance. In November of 1832, the Telegraph noted that several leading citizens were indifferent to the movement because it was associated with sectarianism and urged all individuals, sects, and groups to unite in the temperance cause.²⁹

Temperance agitation was apparently strong in the Mormon settlements of Kirtland and Mentor. On October 6, 1830, the Kirtland Temperance Society was organized.³⁰ Andrew Crary, a resident of Kirtland in this era, stated that the society was both active and influential and "prospered beyond the expectation of its most sanguine advocates."³¹ The Kirtland distillery which had existed since 1819 was closed for want of patronage by February 1, 1833,³² approximately four weeks before Smith announced the revelation. Two distilleries at Mentor were also

²⁹ Painesville Telegraph Painesville, Ohio, Nov. 22, 1832. Additional references to events related to the temperance movement in this newspaper during this time period are located under the following dates: In 1832, Jan. 10, Mar. 13, Mar. 20, April 17, April 24, July 5, July 19, Aug. 9. In 1833, Jan. 18, Feb. 22.

³⁰ Christopher G. Crary, Pioneer and Personal Reminiscences (Marshalltown, Iowa: Marshall Printing Co., 1893), pp. 25-26.

³¹ Ibid., p. 68.

³² Ibid., pp. 23, 24, 68.

discontinued.³³ Crary concluded that the Kirtland society "did more to reclaim the drunkard, save the moderate drinker and protect the rising generation than the whole Prohibition Party of Ohio has ever done or ever will do."³⁴

One can only conjecture as to the influence local temperance agitation had on Joseph Smith and the Mormons. One historian has written that it is not improbable that some Saints were members of the Kirtland Temperance Society,³⁵ while another has recorded that "the Word of Wisdom reflected the impact of the ferment of ideas and movements that thronged the age of Jackson and was the Mormon equivalent of the temperance movement of that age."³⁶ Certainly, while the Mormon Prophet was in all likelihood not associated with any temperance organization, it seems highly improbable that he would not have been sensitive to the prevailing temperance sentiment.

The Health Reform Movement

The physiological health reform movement was another

³³Ibid., p. 68.

³⁴Ibid.,

³⁵Dean D. McBrien, "The Influence of the Frontier on Joseph Smith," (Unpublished Doctor's dissertation, George Washington University, 1929), pp. 147-149.

³⁶Robert K. Fielding, "The Growth of the Mormon Church in Ohio" (Unpublished Doctor's dissertation, Indiana University, 1957), p. 146.

product of nineteenth century religious fervor. This movement was characterized by a preoccupation with the effects of various substances upon the human body.

Sylvester Graham, former agent of the Pennsylvania Temperance Society, was a significant force in this crusade. Graham recommended abstinence from "distilled spirits, wine, beer, cider, tobacco, opium, coffee, tea, pepper, mustard, and every other kind of artificial stimulents and narcotics."³⁷ Graham was not the only one to condemn the use of alcohol, tobacco, tea, and coffee. There is evidence that medical opinion supported some of his views. A contemporary medical journal, The Journal of Health, condemned the use of these four items and also advised against excessive meat eating.³⁸ In Philadelphia, the College of Physicians and Surgeons introduced a course in the pathology of intemperance,³⁹ while some seventy-five physicians in the State of New York signed a statement indicating that distilled spirits would no longer occupy a prominent place on their list of curatives.⁴⁰

³⁷Sylvester Graham, The Aesculapian Tablets of the Nineteenth Century (Providence: Weeden and Cory, 1834), p. vii.

³⁸Journal of Health (Phil.: 1830), Vol. 1, pp. 7, 13, 19, 36, 40, 98, 136, 154, 157-160, 219-220, 297, 329.

³⁹Krout, The Origins of Prohibition, citing Journal of Humanity, February 17, 1830.

⁴⁰Ibid., citing Annual Report, New York State Temperance Society, 1833.

It is evident that at least by 1835, Sylvester Graham's influence had reached parts of Ohio. The Oberlin Covenant not only opposed liquor but also advocated that tea and coffee not be used.⁴¹ School residents were also excited over many of Graham's dietary suggestions and for two or three years the dining hall furnished "Graham fare,"⁴²

The use of tobacco was common in this era and while no influential organizations comparable to temperance societies were established to combat its use, there were indications of reform on the local level, some of which could have conceivably had some influence on Joseph Smith. Oberlin College in nearby Lorain County opposed tobacco,⁴³ while at Gambier, fifty members of the Kenyon temperance society totally abstained from tobacco after hearing Reverend James McElroy state that tobacco was little less injurious than excessive drinking.⁴⁴ Among religious sects, the Shakers discouraged the smoking and chewing of tobacco,⁴⁵ and the Zoar Society of Separatists

⁴¹ James H. Fairchild, Oberlin: The Colony and the College (Oberlin, Ohio: E. J. Goodrich, 1883), pp. 82-83.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Parker, "Edwin M. Stanton at Kenyon," p. 238.

⁴⁵ Nordhoff, Communistic Societies, pp. 166-167,

at Tuscarawas County disallowed its use.⁴⁶ It would appear that some reform was long overdue. In Ohio, the use of tobacco was almost universal among men and not uncommon among women. The "weaker sex" smoked cigars and pipes as well as engaging in the art of snuff chewing.⁴⁷ Tobacco users were notorious for poor manners and sophisticated individuals could do little but complain and hope for better times.⁴⁸

Variant Explanations of the Origin
of the Word of Wisdom

There are at least two schools of thought regarding the origin of the Word of Wisdom. The first generally holds the non-revelatory view that the pronouncement was the product or logical result of contemporary experience and more particularly the temperance movement, while the second school (obviously in the main composed of Church members) accepts the revelatory nature of the Word of Wisdom and claims it grew out of specific problems within the Church. In the writer's opinion it would not be inconsistent for Mormons to accept some combination of both views.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 111.

⁴⁷Buley, "Glimpses of Pioneer History," p. 492.

⁴⁸Francis Trollope, Domestic Manners of the Americans (London: Gilbert and Rivington, 1832), contains many interesting accounts of tobacco abuse in frontier Ohio.

One of the first scholars to advance the notion that the Word of Wisdom was a reflection of the prevailing social and religious climate was Dean McBrien, who wrote in 1929:

A survey of the situation existing at Kirtland when the revelation came forth is a sufficient explanation for it. The temperance wave had for some time been engulfing the West. Just a few years before, Robert Owen had abolished the use of ardent spirits in his community at New Harmony. In 1826 Marcus Morton had founded the American Temperance Society, called at first the Cold Water Society by way of contempt. In June, 1830, the Millennial Harbinger quoted in full, and with the hearty personal endorsement of Alexander Campbell, an article from the Philadelphia "Journal of Health," which article most strongly condemned the use of alcohol, tobacco, the eating intemperately of meats. Thereafter, and his paper gave wide publicity to the temperance cause. Temperance Societies were organized in great numbers during the early thirties, six thousand being formed in one year. On the Western Reserve many temperance lectures were delivered, many temperance pamphlets circulated, and many temperance meetings held from 1826 on. The arguments used everywhere were based as much on physical as on moral grounds. On October 6, 1830, the Kirtland Temperance Society was organized with two hundred thirty nine members. Among its members were listed a George Smith, several Morleys, a Wells, a Coe and a Lyman. These are names all associated with the history of Mormonism, and it is not improbable, though not known as certain, that these temperance workers had relatives among the Saints, even if they themselves were not Mormons.⁴⁹

McBrien's position is based on credible evidence. As pointed out previously, there is little question that Joseph Smith and Church members were aware of and probably influenced by temperance crusades. The movement was national in scope and heartily endorsed by prominent

⁴⁹ McBrien, "The Influence of the Frontier on Joseph Smith," pp. 147-149.

political and religious leaders. It has been demonstrated that at the time the revelation was announced the Western Reserve area of Ohio was the scene of much temperance agitation, and societies had been formed and were operating in Mormon townships, apparently with a good deal of success. Certainly Joseph's declaration that "strong drinks are not for the belly" reflected contemporary American opinion on the question of intemperance. It would be less safe however, to assert that Joseph was influenced by movements that opposed the use of tobacco, tea, and coffee. There is no record of the Prophet ever meeting or mentioning Sylvester Graham and it would appear that "Grahamism" did not become popular in Ohio until after the revelation had been promulgated.

The traditional Mormon view of the origin of the Word of Wisdom was best explained by Brigham Young:

I think I am as well acquainted with the circumstances which led to the giving of the Word of Wisdom as any man in the Church, although I was not present at the time to witness them. The first school of the prophets was held in a small room situated over the Prophet Joseph's kitchen, in a house, which belonged to Bishop Whitney, and which was attached to his store, which more probably might be about fifteen feet square. In the rear of this building was a kitchen, probably ten by fourteen feet, containing rooms and pantries. Over this kitchen was situated the room in which the Prophet received revelations and in which he instructed his brethren. The brethren came to that place ~~for~~ hundreds of miles to attend school in a little room probably no larger than eleven by fourteen. When they assembled together in this room after breakfast, the first thing they did was to light their pipes, and while smoking, talk about the great things of the kingdom, and spit all over the room, and as soon as the pipe was out of their mouths a large chew of tobacco would then

be taken. Often when the Prophet entered the room to give the school instructions he would find himself in a cloud of tobacco smoke. This, and the complaints of his wife at having to clean so filthy a floor made the Prophet think upon the matter, and he inquired of the Lord relating to the conduct of the Elders in using tobacco, and the revelation known as the Word of Wisdom was the result of his inquiry.⁵⁰

David Whitmer, a prominent Mormon in the 1830's, became disaffected from the Church and years later gave his own version of the origin of the revelation:

. . . quite a little party of the brethren and sisters being assembled in Smith's house. Some of the men were excessive chewers of the filthy weed, and their disgusting slobbering and spitting caused Mrs. Smith . . . to make the ironical remark that "It would be a good thing if a revelation could be had declaring the use of tobacco a sin, and commanding its suppression." The matter was taken up and joked about, one of the brethren suggested that the revelation should also provide for a total abstinence from tea and coffee drinking, intending this as a counter dig at the sisters. Sure enough the subject was afterward taken up in dead earnest, and the 'Word of Wisdom' was the result.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Brigham Young, Sermon of February 8, 1868, Journal of Discourses, XII (London, 1884), p. 158. Further insight into this incident is provided by the following account of Zebedee Coltrin, who some fifty years later related the actual circumstances when Smith announced the revelation: "The Prophet Joseph was in an adjoining room . . . and came in with that Revelation in his hand. Out of the Twenty two members that were there assembled, all used tobacco more or less, except two, Joseph read the Revelation and when they heard it they all laid aside their pipes and use of tobacco . . . See: "Minutes of the St. George School of the Prophets," December 23, 1883, Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, cited hereafter as HDC.

⁵¹ Des Moines Daily News [Des Moines, Iowa], October 16, 1886.

Although Whitmer obviously did not accept this and many other later revelations as inspired, his statement agrees basically with Brigham Young's explanation. Both concluded that a contemporary situation or problem caused the Prophet to seek further knowledge and obtain more conclusive information on the subject. Young obviously represented the traditional Church viewpoint by implying that Joseph's source of knowledge was Deity, while Whitmer inferred a less than divine origin. Both explanations are quite compatible with McBrien's position, and many Mormons see nothing inconsistent in accepting both interpretations by believing that it was characteristic for Joseph Smith to seek enlightenment on a subject by way of communication with God only after he had some personal experience or problem with it.

CHAPTER III

A TIME OF TRIAL AND MODERATION: THE FIRST DECADE OF THE WORD OF WISDOM

There was no consistent pattern of interpretation or application of the Word of Wisdom between the time it was given and the middle 1840's. This may well be explained by the fact that the principle was still in its infancy and differing approaches to it by Church authorities were to be expected. Nevertheless, a few trends are clearly discernable.

It is evident that at first adherence to at least some portions of the revelation was mandatory and necessary for Church fellowship. Years later Zebedee Coltrin recalled that "those who gave up using tobacco eased off on licorice root, but there was no easing off on Tea and Coffee; these they had to give up straight or their fellowship was jeopardised."¹

Apparently by the mid-1830's it was well-understood that "hot drinks" specifically referred to tea and coffee. In 1833 a Sister Brown apostatized from the Church, giving as one of her reasons that Joseph Smith's

¹Minutes of the Salt Lake School of the Prophets," October 11, 1883, HDC.

wife had offered her a cup of tea or coffee after a long arduous journey.² In 1835, two Mormon missionaries, Wilford Woodruff and Harry Brown, surprised a Mr. Jerrew and his wife by not drinking coffee.³ That same year William W. Phelps noted that the Kirtland Saints were living the Word of Wisdom and refraining from tea and coffee.⁴ The minutes of ecclesiastical trials of prominent Mormons at Far West, Missouri provide additional evidence that abstinence from these articles was stressed. Oliver Cowdery justified drinking tea for health purposes, while David and John Whitmer claimed they used tea and coffee but never considered them to be hot drinks.⁵ Lyman Johnson was also charged with drinking tea and coffee, as well as whiskey,⁶ and at Far West the Saints voted to not support stores selling these items.⁷

While the Saints opposed the common use of tea

²"Memoirs of George Albert Smith," entry under 1833, HDC.

³Journal History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, January 13, 1835, HDC. Cited hereafter as Journal History.

⁴Journal History, May 26, 1835.

⁵"Far West Record," p. 92, document containing minutes of meetings held in Ohio and Missouri, HDC.

⁶"Far West Record," p. 119.

⁷Joseph Smith, History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, ed. B. H. Roberts (2nd. ed. rev.; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1967), II, 524, hereafter cited as Smith, History of the Church.

and coffee, it would appear that they had little objection ✓ to its occasional use for medicinal purposes. In an age when these items were frequently used as a relief for a wide variety of ailments, it would have been imprudent to have entirely forbidden their use.⁸ Incidents such as Cowdery drinking tea and Emma Smith offering a tired traveler a hot drink for extreme fatigue are understandable when viewed in this perspective.

A similar point could be made regarding the consumption of strong drinks. While the general use of whiskey and liquor was contrary to the principle, many Saints felt these beverages had redeeming medicinal qualities. It was drunk by some to help remedy the effects of cholera, and evidently was used as an alleviating cure for the effects of other sicknesses.⁹ Sidney Rigdon, perhaps as strict and rigid as any Mormon leader regarding Word of Wisdom observance, proposed in December, 1836, that Churchmembers discontinue liquor in health and in sickness, but it would appear that this instruction was not followed by many Saints.¹⁰ The fact that Rigdon's

⁸Madge E. Pickard and R. Carlyle Buley, The Midwest Pioneer- His Ills, Cures, and Doctors (Crawfordsville, Indiana: R. E. Banta, 1945), pp. 35-97, provides an excellent treatment of frontier medical procedures and curatives.

⁹"Memoirs of George Albert Smith," entry under 1834, and Elden J. Watson, (ed.), Manuscript History of Brigham Young 1801-1844 (Salt Lake City: Utah Secretarial Service, 1968), pp. 50-52.

¹⁰Matthias Cowley (ed.), Wilford Woodruff: History of His Life and Labors (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1964), p. 65.

approach to the Word of Wisdom reflected his basic tendency to define or explain many issues and principles along rigid lines probably accounted in part for the lack of complete support that this proposal received. As will be seen, the Prophet had quite a different approach.

Some Church members used liquor for reasons other than medicinal. Joseph Smith and other prisoners drank liquor and whiskey in the Liberty Jail in token of friendship,¹¹ while references to wine-drinking are commonplace. Excessive drinking, however, was not tolerated, and some Mormons were threatened with loss of membership for failure to curb drunkenness.¹²

The journal of Joseph Smith reveals many instances where Joseph and other Church leaders drank wine and a tolerant attitude towards the consumption of this beverage is particularly noticeable. After a wedding feast in January, 1836, Joseph wrote: "We then partook of some refreshments, and our hearts were made glad with the fruit of the vine."¹³ A week later at the marriage of John Boynton, Orson Hyde, Luke S. Johnson, and Warren Parrish presented the Presidency with three servers of glasses filled with wine, to bless. Joseph recorded his

¹¹ Andrew Jenson, Historical Record (Salt Lake City: Andrew Jenson, 1888), VII, 456. Peter H. Burnett, Recollections and Opinions of an old Pioneer (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1880), pp. 65-66.

¹² "Far West Record," p. 138.

¹³ Smith, History of the Church, II, p. 369.

reaction as follows:

And it fell to my lot to attend to this duty, which I cheerfully discharged. It was then passed round in order; then the cake in the same order; and suffice it to say, our hearts were made glad while partaking of the bounty of earth which was presented, until we had taken our fill; and joy filled every bosum¹⁴

In May, 1843, the Prophet drank a glass of wine with Sister Jenetta Richards.¹⁵ Despite the injunction contained in the revelation discouraging the drinking of wine, (except for sacramental purposes) the casual nature of the allusions to this beverage suggest that many Church Authorities did not consider moderate wine drinking in the same category as the use of strong drinks.

What, then, constituted Word of Wisdom observance in the 1830's? Evidence suggests that the drinking of tea, coffee, and liquor was in general violation of the principle, though exceptions can be found. All of these items were used by the Saints for medicinal purposes. Moderate wine-drinking was evidently acceptable to most Church leaders. There is little mention of tobacco, and although Church members voted in 1837 not to support institutions selling this commodity, it seems safe to assert that the Saints were allowed some lee-way in this area. Coltrin's observation regarding the "easing off on

¹⁴Ibid., II, pp. 377-378.

¹⁵Ibid., V, 380.

licorice root" supports this contention.¹⁶ In short, it would seem that adherence to the revelation to at least 1839 required Church members to be moderately temperate but certainly not total abstinence.

Whatever interpretation was given to it, the Word of Wisdom was nevertheless regularly emphasized in the early years of the Church. In February, 1834, the High Council of the Church resolved that, "No official member in this Church is worthy to hold an office, after having the Word of Wisdom properly taught him, and he, the official member, neglecting to comply with or obey it"¹⁷ This statement was later reprinted in the November, 1836 issue of the Messenger and Advocate to answer "frequent applications . . . for advice respecting official members of this Church relative to their observance of the Word of Wisdom."¹⁸ In May of 1837 the Messenger and Advocate reaffirmed its previous stand and stressed obedience to all of God's commandments.¹⁹ The Quorum of Seventies voted to withdraw fellowship from

¹⁶ "Minutes of the Salt Lake School of the Prophets," October 11, 1883. Refer to first page of Chapter for the first reference to Coltrin's quote.

¹⁷ Smith, History of the Church, II, p. 35.

¹⁸ Messenger and Advocate [Kirtland, Ohio], November, 1836, p. 412.

¹⁹ Ibid., May 1837, pp. 510-511.

non-observers (so far as not recognizing them as preachers of the Gospel) in July, 1837, and five months later this same group covenanted to keep the Word of Wisdom.²⁰

The doctrines of the revelation were first publicly taught in England in 1837 and Heber C. Kimball recorded "that it was almost universally attended to by the brethren."²¹

In 1838 Joseph Smith made one of his relatively few public utterances on the revelation, urging its observance.²² Ironically, three weeks earlier, Hyrum Smith, possibly assuming that the upcoming rigors associated with the trip to Missouri outweighed Word of Wisdom considerations, instructed the proposed members of the Kirtland Camp, "not to be particular regarding the Word of Wisdom."²³

Early travels among various branches of the Church by leaders revealed stresses and problems involved in Word of Wisdom interpretation and observance. It was noted that many of the Saints at Pillow Point, Ohio failed to observe its precepts while all eight members in Suffield, Ohio lived it.²⁴ Orson Hyde observed that the

²⁰Journal History, July 30, December 27, 1835.

²¹R. B. Thompson, (ed.), Journal of Heber C. Kimball (Nauvoo, Ill.: n.p., 1840), pp. 29-30.

²²Smith, History of the Church, III, 15. See also "Far West Record," p. 19.

²³Ibid., III, 95.

²⁴Ibid., II, 225; Journal History, June 18, 1837.

Lavona Branch lacked the enjoyment of the spirit in consequence of a neglect to keep the Word of Wisdom, while William W. Phelps, in a letter written to his wife, commented on the strictness with which the Kirtland Saints lived the revelation. Said Phelps: "You are not aware how much sameness there is among the saints in Kirtland: they drink cold water, and don't even mention tea and coffee" ²⁵ Charges were often made against individual members of the Church for not living the principles of the revelation. In April and June of 1835, Chester L. Heath and Milo Hays were expelled from the Church for covenant breaking and failure to observe the Word of Wisdom. ²⁶ Shortly afterward Almon W. Babbitt was accused before a Council of the Presidency of not keeping the Word of Wisdom. Babbitt claimed "he had taken the liberty to break the Word of Wisdom from the example of Joseph Smith . . . but acknowledged that it was wrong" ²⁷ In 1838, charges regarding Word of Wisdom infractions were leveled at many Church members, including prominent leaders, ²⁸ and as late as 1840 one John Lawson lost his fellowship for a short time. ²⁹

²⁵ Ibid., II, 223; Journal History, May 26, 1835.

²⁶ Ibid., II, 218; Ibid., II, 227-228.

²⁷ Ibid., II, 252.

²⁸ "Far West Record," pp. 92, 119, 124, 126, 138; Smith, History of the Church, III, 18, 31.

²⁹ Smith, History of the Church, IV, 302. Lawson was soon afterward restored to fellowship.

In all cases where membership or fellowship was taken away, there were other accusations that were directed at the offender. In many cases the Word of Wisdom violation appeared to have been considered less important than the other infractions. In fact, the evidence strongly suggests that Mormons were not expelled solely for violations of the Word of Wisdom except in the case of extreme drunkenness.

The many problems, diverse reactions, and differing responses to the revelation were to be expected. Any new thought or principle generally goes through a time of testing as far as its acceptance is concerned, and it can certainly be expected that various interpretations will be placed on it as men try to understand all its ramifications. In addition to this, the Word of Wisdom was somewhat unique in that it was a revelation that was given "not by way of commandment," allowing a good deal of subjectivity for individual interpretation. Finally, one must also consider that many Saints probably felt the Word of Wisdom was an important principle but one that should not result in self condemnation and discouragement if a high level of obedience was not immediately reached. After all, the Saints had fallen short in other areas of Christian living. They had been less than successful in living the Law of Consecration, they were not always diplomatic and prudent in their relationships with others, and they occasionally bickered among themselves. With

these admitted shortcomings, would God not, then, be just as patient with their weaknesses in this area?

The Move To Nauvoo

By late 1839 the Mormons driven from Missouri, had begun to gather in Illinois, where Joseph Smith envisioned and guided the construction of Nauvoo. It first appeared that the city fathers had designed this city as a "dry town." In February, 1841, the city council prohibited liquor by the drink and declared exceptions to this rule punishable by a fine of twenty-five dollars. "In the discussion of the foregoing bill," said the Prophet, "I spoke at great length on the use of liquors and showed that they were unnecessary, and operate as a poison in the stomach, and that roots and herbs can be found to effect all necessary purposes."³⁰ The Nauvoo House charter, written one week later, prohibited the use or sale of intoxicating beverages on the premises.³¹ On April 6, 1841, the cornerstones of the Nauvoo Temple were laid. Concerning these proceedings, Smith noted: "What added greatly to the happiness we experienced . . . is the fact that we heard no obscene . . . language; neither saw we any one intoxicated. Can

³⁰Times and Seasons [Nauvoo, Ill.], February 15, 1841, II, 321.

³¹Smith, History of the Church, IV, 302.

the same be said of a similar assemblage in any other city in the Union? Thank God that the intoxicating beverage, the bane of humanity in these last days, is becoming a stranger in Nauvoo."³² In November of the same year, the city council ordered the raising of a grocery which was dispensing liquor unlawfully.³³

There are other indications of initial attempts to observe the strong drink portion of the Word of Wisdom. Elder Calvin Beebe lost his Church membership for "breaking covenant" and keeping a tippling shop. The council responsible for the "Beebe decision" further resolved to "disfellowship all persons in this Church who now do, or may hereafter keep a tippling shop, or shops."³⁴ In July, 1841, the Leachburgh Branch determined to disfellowship any member who continued to use spirits, which course of action was taken by the Zarahemla Branch one month later.³⁵

Nauvoo however, was a thriving river town as well as a city of Saints. In all probability, the desires of the growing Gentile element for easier accessibility of alcoholic beverages, along with similar urgings of many Mormons not holding to the view of strict abstinence, led to a gradual relaxation and liberalization of liquor

³²Ibid., IV, 330-331.

³³Times and Seasons, November 15, 1841, III, 599-600.

³⁴Ibid., June 7, 1841, II, 498-499.

³⁵Ibid., July 2, 1841, II, 464; August 1841, II, 548.

laws.³⁶ As early as July, 1841, Joseph Smith, while in city council meeting, "moved that any person in the City of Nauvoo be at liberty to sell vinous liquors in any quantity, subject to the city ordinances."³⁷ In city council the following month, Joseph advocated the repeal of the ordinance . . . licensing merchants, hawkers, taverns, and ordinaries, desiring that this might be a free people, and enjoy equal rights and privileges"³⁸ The Prophet's son recorded that his father in late 1842 was determined to equip and operate a bar in the Nauvoo Mansion. Emma's severe protestations and threats soon discouraged the enterprise, however.³⁹

One can only surmise the reason for Smith's apparent change in attitude toward liquor laws. Two historians of this period of Church history have pointed out that by early 1842, general economic conditions in Illinois were near a state of collapse.⁴⁰ Nauvoo likewise lacked economic stability, and although business

³⁶Robert Bruce Flanders, Nauvoo: Kingdom on the Mississippi (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965), p. 246.

³⁷Smith, History of the Church, IV, 383.

³⁸Ibid., V, 8.

³⁹The Saints Herald [Independence, Mo.], Jan. 22, 1935.

⁴⁰Flanders, Nauvoo, p. 167: Kenneth W. Godfrey, "Causes of Mormon Non-Mormon Conflict In Hancock County, Illinois, 1839-1846" (unpublished Doctor's dissertation, Brigham Young University, 1967), p. 184.

was sometimes brisk its economy suffered from a lack of ready cash.⁴¹ The Prophet himself filed for bankruptcy in April, 1842.⁴² Whether or not conditions such as these influenced this secular trend is of course, open to conjecture.

By 1843 further liberalizations of Nauvoo's liquor ordinances were apparent. In March of that year Joseph gave Theodore Turley permission to build a brewery.⁴³ In June, Apostle Heber C. Kimball advised the members of the Lima Branch to not "nip and tuck at the Word of Wisdom, but stress the integrity of one's heart."⁴⁴ In December the council passed an ordinance that authorized Joseph "to sell or give spirits of any quantity as he . . . shall judge to for the health and comfort, or convenience of such travelers or other persons as shall visit his house from time to time."⁴⁵ By March, 1844, Theodore Turley was advertising that he had "constantly on hand a supply of Ale, Beer, and Yeast of the best quality for sale, both wholesale and retail, at his Brewery"⁴⁶ An ordinance passed in

⁴¹Flanders, Nauvoo, p. 162.

⁴²Ibid., p. 169.

⁴³Smith, History of the Church V, p. 300.

⁴⁴Times and Seasons, June 11, 1843, IV, 316.

⁴⁵Smith, History of the Church VI, 111.

⁴⁶Nauvoo Neighbor [Nauvoo, Ill.], March 6, 1844.

October, 1844, enabled anyone who had procured a proper license to sell or dispense drinks in less quantity than one gallon. People attempting to dispense liquor without a license were to be fined and tried before the Mayor.⁴⁷

Although a trend toward a less rigid application of the Word of Wisdom was readily observable, (at least with regard to the portion dealing with alcoholic beverages) some continued to hold to a more strict interpretation. At a meeting held on April 10, 1843, several prospective missionaries "were ordained elders with this express injunction, that they quit the use of tobacco and keep the Word of Wisdom."⁴⁸ In November, 1844, the Saints at LaCrosse voted to abstain from the "common use of tobacco and all spirituous liquors."⁴⁹ Two months later, a Bishop Hale encouraged some of the male church members to keep the Word of Wisdom "as much as possible."⁵⁰ In March of 1845, Mormon Branches at Waynesville, and Alquina, Iowa agreed to keep the Word of Wisdom.⁵¹

While Nauvoo obviously relaxed its laws control-

⁴⁷ Ibid., October 23, 1844.

⁴⁸ Smith, History of the Church, V, 349.

⁴⁹ Journal History, November 6, 1844.

⁵⁰ "Minutes of the Aaronic Priesthood at Nauvoo Ill.," Jan. 31, 1845, p. 17, HDC.

⁵¹ Journal History, March 9, 1845; Times and Seasons, March, 1845, VI, 842.

ling liquor, it should not be supposed that Mormon society as a whole drank excessively, as apparently was the case in most river towns. The Hancock Eagle, a non-Mormon publication, in 1846 lamented the fact that ardent spirits were so difficult to procure.⁵² Another non-Mormon observer expressed astonishment at not seeing "loungers about the streets nor any drunkards about the taverns."⁵³ By 1846, then, the somewhat strict prohibitions of the 1830's regarding the use of alcohol, tobacco, tea, and coffee among the Mormons had begun to erode away, as moderation rather than abstinence became the major concern. Still, Mormons as a whole were more temperate than contemporary frontier society.

Joseph Smith's Personal Approach

Through the years, there have been extremes in evaluating Joseph Smith's faithfulness regarding Word of Wisdom observance. Many writers have declared that Joseph was not only a non-observer but a flagrant drunkard. John C. Bennett said the Mormon Prophet got "gloriously drunk occasionally,"⁵⁴ while Governor Thomas Ford stated

⁵²The Hancock Eagle [Hancock Co., Ill.], April 10, 1846.

⁵³Charles Mackay, The Religious, Social, and Political History of the Mormons (New York: Miller, Orton, and Mulligan, 1856), p. 155.

⁵⁴John C. Bennett, The History of the Saints (Boston: Leland and Whiting, 1842), p. 94.

that "at times he drank like a sailor."⁵⁵ Henry Caswall accused Joseph of operating a brewery at Nauvoo and mentioned that he was often seen drunk.⁵⁶ Most of these authors make no pretensions at objectivity and in truth the majority seem to have an axe to grind. At the other extreme, William Clayton, Smith's personal secretary, claimed in 1842 that the Prophet did not use intoxicating drinks or tobacco.⁵⁷ Such a statement appears to be an exaggeration for it was observed earlier in the chapter that Joseph drank liquor in the Liberty jail and had few qualms about drinking wine. Likewise, shortly before his death the Prophet requested wine to drink. John Taylor

⁵⁵Thomas Ford, A History of Illinois (Chicago: S. C. Griggs and Co., 1854), p. 355.

⁵⁶Henry Caswall, The City of the Mormons (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1851), p. 8. Other works which accuse Smith of being less than temperate after 1833 are: Harry M. Beardsley, Joseph Smith and His Mormon Empire (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1931), pp. 160-161; John Bowes, Mormonism Exposed (London: E. Ward, no date given), p. 63; Fawn M. Brodie, No Man Knows My History (New York: Alfred A. Knoff, 1945), p. 167; Henry Caswall, The City of the Mormons or, Three Days in Nauvoo in 1842 (London: J. G. F. and J. Rivington, 1843), p. ; William H. Dixon, New America (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1867), p. 136; Thomas Gregg, The Prophet of Palmyra (New York: John B. Alden, 1890), p. 510; Robert Richards, The Californian Crusoe (London: John Henry Parker, no date given), p. 84; W. Wyl, Mormon Portraits of the Truth about the Mormon Leaders from 1830 to 1886 (Salt Lake City: Tribune Printing and Pub. Co., 1886), p. 22.

⁵⁷The Millennial Star, August, 1842, III, 76.

described this incident as follows:

It has been reported by some that this was taken as a sacrament. It was no such thing: our spirits were generally dull and heavy, and it was sent for to revive us . . . I believe we all drank of the wine, and gave some to one or two of the guards. We all of us felt unusually dull and languid, with a remarkable depression of spirits.⁵⁸

A further indication of the Prophet's attitude toward the revelation can be gleaned by noting how he handled some individuals that had been accused of drunkenness. Joseph recorded the event as follows:

It was reported to me that some of the brethren had been drinking whiskey that day in violation of the Word of Wisdom. I called the brethren in and investigated the case, and was satisfied that no evil had been done, and gave them a couple of dollars, with directions to replenish the bottle to stimulate them in the fatigues of their sleepless journey.⁵⁹

In conclusion, it appears clear that Joseph Smith never interpreted the revelation as demanding total abstinence, but stressed moderation and self-control. His opposition to intemperance is evidenced by earlier statements which referred to intemperance as a "monster"⁶⁰ and "the bane of humanity."⁶¹ The Prophet

⁵⁸ Smith, History of the Church, VII, 101.

⁵⁹ The Millennial Star, June 27, 1843, XXI, 283. For other noteworthy incidents suggesting that the Prophet was overly concerned about total abstinence see: The Millennial Star, November 9, 1861, XXIII, 720; Oliver Huntington, "Journal of Oliver Huntington, Vol. 2, p. 166, copy located in the Special Collections Library, Brigham Young University.

⁶⁰ Smith, History of the Church, II, 406.

⁶¹ Ibid., IV, 330-331.

almost never used tobacco, although it is recorded that once at Nauvoo he tried the faith of the Saints by smoking a cigar after having preached a discourse on the Word of Wisdom.⁶² He had no objections to using tobacco for medicinal purposes. With regard to wine and "strong drink" possibly the most accurate index to the Prophet's position was expressed by Benjamin F. Johnson, who personally knew Joseph: "As a companion, socially, he was highly endowed; was kind, generous, mirth loving, and at times even convivial. He was partial to a well supplied table and he did not always refuse the wine that maketh the heart glad."⁶³

Joseph's approach to the Word of Wisdom, when viewed in historical perspective, seems sensible and rational. In the late 1830's, the Kirtland Stake had dissolved due to apostasy, the Missouri Saints were being driven from the State with accompanying hardships, and Joseph himself was imprisoned. At a time when the Church was struggling for mere existence, it would seem small and petty to quibble about a drink of tea or coffee. Similarly, after a comparatively comfortable initial existence in Nauvoo, Mormon society was torn apart by internal dissension and by the controversy and persecution which resulted from the promulgation and practice of peculiar religious

⁶² Abraham Cannon, "Journal of Abraham Cannon," October 1, 1895, HDC.

⁶³ Letter from Benjamin F. Johnson to George F. Gibbs, 1903, HDC. George F. Gibbs was the secretary to the First Presidency.

doctrines. Emphasis on a rigid interpretation of a health code during such a period of turmoil would seem ill-timed and inappropriate. Moreover, there is some evidence that Joseph sought to avoid needless dissension among the Saints by urging moderation and charity. It would appear that some Mormons had been influenced by the fanaticism that characterized sermons of some of the radical temperance reformers, and tended to be intolerant of those with professed Word of Wisdom weaknesses. The Prophet, recognizing that the revelation must be seen in perspective with other matters and doctrines pertaining to the growth of the "Kingdom," urged them to be slow to judge or condemn others. Joseph's rather curt reaction to a talk advocating "temperance in the extreme" was illustrative of his desire to teach the Saints to be charitable and merciful, rather than vindictive and unforgiving. After reproving the speaker as Pharisaical and hypocritical, the Prophet said the following:

If you do not accuse each other, God will not accuse you. If you have no accuser you will enter heaven, and if you will follow the revelations and instructions which God gives you through me, I will take you into heaven as my back load. If you will not accuse me, I will not accuse you. If you will throw a cloak of charity over my sins, I will over yours --for charity coverth a multitude of sins. What many people call sin is not sin; I do many things to break down superstition, and I will break it down; 'I referred to the curse of Ham for laughing at Noah, while in his wine, but doing no harm. Noah was a righteous man, and yet he drank wine and became intoxicated; the Lord did not forsake him in consequence thereof,

for he retained all the power of his priesthood, and when he was accused by Canaan, he cursed him by the priesthood which he held, and the Lord had respect to his word, and the priesthood which he held, notwithstanding he was drunk, and the curse remains upon the posterity of Canaan until the present day.⁶⁴

If the Lord could be tolerant and forgiving of Noah, then Joseph and the Saints could be tolerant and forgiving of each other.⁶⁵

⁶⁴Smith, History of the Church, IV, 445.

⁶⁵The idea that Joseph sought to teach mercy and charity in relation to the Word of Wisdom is not original with the author but was gleaned from a perceptive term paper written for a graduate class. See: Ronald K. Esplin, "The Restoration Generation Receives The Word of Wisdom" (unpublished term paper, Religion 541, Brigham Young University, 1972), pp. 15-16.

CHAPTER IV

NOT BY COMMANDMENT OR CONSTRAINT

The tendency toward tolerance in interpreting the Word of Wisdom continued in the Church from the death of Joseph Smith to the 1860's. As a group, in fact, it seems that Mormons were less inclined to observe Word of Wisdom principles during this era than any other. At least two practical reasons may account for this. First, many Mormons probably felt that alcohol, tobacco, tea, and coffee had redeeming qualities from the standpoint of medical need and fatigue, and reasoned that the obvious hardships associated with the settlement of a harsh and barren region justified their use. It was customary during this era, for example, to use various kinds of tea for fevers, pleurisy, small-pox, and measles. Whiskey was occasionally used to remedy the effects of a sore throat. Coffee and tobacco were also regarded as curatives for some diseases.¹ Secondly, Brigham Young, successor to Joseph Smith as Mormon Prophet and President, never chose to make obedience to the Word of Wisdom a test of fellowship in the Church. As Nels Anderson has observed:

¹Madge E. Pickard and R. Carlyle Buley, The Midwest Pioneer-His Ills, Cures, and Doctors (Crawfordsville, Indiana, 1945), pp. 35-97.

For him the test of a man's faith was his integrity to an assignment given by the church. Could a man take a company of Saints to a desert and hold them to the task of building a community: then it didn't matter much to Brother Brigham if he was a user of whiskey and tobacco. Those Word of Wisdom virtues were precious to him but secondary.²

This attitude of permissiveness rather than vigilance can be observed plainly in the experience of the Mormons who left Nauvoo in 1846 to begin their journey to the Rocky Mountains. In 1845 for example, a list of desirable supplies to be taken by each family, printed in the Nauvoo Neighbor, included one pound each of tea and coffee and one gallon of alcohol.³ While it is possible that these items were used occasionally for medicinal purposes, it is apparent that some of them were in general use among the Mormon emigrants. Abraham O. Smoot, President of the School of Prophets in Provo in the late 1860's, recalled that the "camp-fire habits" of the pioneers included the partaking of tea and coffee and the use of tobacco.⁴

While firm declarations like those of the 1830's

²Nels Anderson, Desert Saints: The Mormon Frontier in Utah (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942), p. 439.

³Nauvoo Neighbor, October 29, 1845.

⁴"Minutes of the Provo School of the Prophets," September 8, 1868, HDC. For more such inferences see: "Published Notes from the Diary of Eliza R. Snow," The Improvement Era, XLVI (March, 1943), 188; Charles Kelly (ed.), Journals of John D. Lee (Salt Lake City: Western Publishing Co., 1938), p. 35.

exhorting the Saints to observe the revelation in order to be worthy members were not made in this era, the principle was not ignored and some problems concerning individual application are on record. In England in 1850 the Millenial Star reported that the subject had "given rise to dissensions in various branches of the Church . . . ,"⁵ while in Salt Lake City, the Deseret News put forth the following declaration in December of the same year:

We recommend a thorough perusal of the . . . Word of Wisdom to the Twelve, High Priests, Seventies, Elders, Bishops, Priests, Teachers, Deacons, Brethren and Sisters of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints; and that the officers . . . present the subject before the Church . . . and decide whether they are sent forth in the wisdom of heaven, or in the folly of man⁶

Additional evidence of serious concern is seen in the fact that in December, 1850, Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, Parley P. Pratt, and other Church met in Young's "upper room" to pray. Here they concluded to "renew the Word of Wisdom."⁷

On balance, however, the early 1850's were characterized by a rather casual and informal attitude toward

⁵The Millenial Star [Liverpool, England], XII (Feb. 14, 1850) 60.

⁶Deseret News [Salt Lake City], December 28, 1850.

⁷Journal History, December 27, 1847, HDC.

observance of the Word of Wisdom, and little concern was expressed over mild infractions. The obvious emphasis on moderation can be clearly observed with regard to the attitude of the Church toward liquor importation and production.

Although Church leaders were concerned with liquor abuse and established early controls to regulate the importation of liquor,⁸ they had little objection to its production under strict regulation.⁹ In fact, the Deseret News took a positive view toward building a city brewery,¹⁰ while Brigham Young himself manufactured liquor for "rational purposes."¹¹ However, individual Saints were admonished by Heber C. Kimball not to sell beer and strong drink unless counseled to get a license.¹² Kimball, first counselor to Brigham Young, viewed individuals that sold intoxicating liquors without proper counsel with disdain. On one occasion he related seeing in vision the

⁸Howard Stansbury, Exploration and Survey of the Valley of the Great Salt Lake of Utah (Phil.: Lippincott, Grambo, and Co., 1852), p. 133.

⁹During the early Territorial period the governor could level any restriction he desired. See James B. Allen, "The Development of County Government in the Territory of Utah" (unpublished Master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1956), pp. 70-76.

¹⁰Deseret News, September 7, 1850.

¹¹Brigham Young, Sermon of June 7, 1863, Journal of Discourses, (London, 1854-1886), X, 206. Hereafter cited as JD.

¹²Deseret News, December 14, 1854.

armies of heaven. According to Kimball this army would be composed of righteous Saints, those that would "not sell whisky, and stick groceries, and establish distilleries" ¹³ Church authorities continued to have little patience with drunkards and as early as 1847, the Salt Lake High Council voted to fine violaters. ¹⁴

The comparatively few references made by Church leaders during this period lend further credence to the idea that Word of Wisdom observance was not a major topic of concern. Orson Pratt's admission that Word of Wisdom infractions were not as serious as disobedience to more fundamental Gospel principles was indicative of the prevailing attitude. ¹⁵ (Pratt, a strict observer, still felt the revelation should be obeyed.) It would appear that strict observance was an individual option or consideration. Richard Ballantyne noted while sailing to his Mission assignment in England, that many of the missionaries on board never partook of tea and coffee, "preferring to observe the Word of Wisdom." ¹⁶

One can only surmise to what extent the Word of

¹³Heber C. Kimball, Sermon of November 26, 1854, JD, II, 161.

¹⁴Journal History, December 27, 1847.

¹⁵Orson Pratt, Sermon of May 20, 1855, JD, III, 18.

¹⁶Richard Ballantyne, "Journal of Richard Ballantyne" February, 1853, Vol. 1, p. 34, copy located in the Special Collections Library, Brigham Young University.

Wisdom was observed by lay members of the Church. Observations made by four non-Mormons who traveled through Utah Territory in the 1850's suggest that Mormons were considerably more moderate in the use of alcohol, tobacco, tea, and coffee, than was contemporary society. Franklin Langworthy noted in 1850 that Mormons did not use intoxicating drinks.¹⁷ S. N. Carvalho spent ten weeks in Salt Lake City in 1854 and was impressed at the lack of grog shops and at the fact that he never saw a drunken man.¹⁸ More accurate notes were taken by William Chandless and Jules Remy in 1855. Chandless, after eating dinner with a Mormon family, commented on the absence of tea and coffee, and noted that although the Saints had a Word of Wisdom, this was the only family he had seen, "that while rich enough to obey, followed the advice."¹⁹ Remy, perhaps the most sage observer, made two statements in 1855 which suggest that the stress was on moderation rather than abstinence. He first noted that:

Although there are neither grog-shops nor dealers in any kind of drinks to be met with, it does not necessarily follow that the Saints refrain from the moderate use of spirituous or fermented liquors. No command compels them to reject certain productions of nature or of art. It is true that Joseph Smith, in a sermon entitled "Word of Wisdom," counsels the true believers to abstain from the use of fermented

¹⁷ Franklin Langworthy, Scenery of the Plains, Mountains, and Mines (Ogdenburgh: J. C. Sprague, 1955), p. 78.

¹⁸ S. N. Carvalho, Incidents of Travel and Adventure in the Far West (New York: Derby and Jackson, 1857), p. 143.

¹⁹ William Chandless, A Visit to Salt Lake (London: Elder, and Co., 1857), pp. 228-229.

drinks and tobacco, and recommends such abstinence as a means of arriving at perfection. The more fervent do abstain with this view, but occasionally they make no scruple of the moderate use of drink. Many of them take beer, to make which they cultivate hops in their valleys; others drink wine when they can get it, and some even indulge in whisky, which they distil from the potato.²⁰

Remy later observed that Mormons were more temperate than most societies and used coffee and tea less frequently than other staples. He added that, "the majority abstain from fermented or spirituous liquors, either voluntarily and from motives of temperance, or on account of their poverty," and concluded by pointing out that the tobacco habit was "less usual among them than in other parts of the Union."²¹

While it was evident that Church authorities had little concern with individual Word of Wisdom lapses, it is interesting to note that in the 1850's a new trend in teaching adherence to the revelation began. This trend continued throughout the administration of Brigham Young. Accepting the fact that many older Saints were addicted to their tobacco, or "hot drink" habits, and realizing that many would have a difficult time living a life of abstinence, Church leaders began to appeal to the younger generation to live the Word of Wisdom. Brigham Young

²⁰ Jules Remy and Julius Brenchley, A Journey to Great-Salt Lake City (London: W. Jeffs, 1861), Vol. 1, p. 198.

²¹ Remy and Brenchley, Journey to Salt Lake, Vol. 1, pp. 271-272.

and George A. Smith, an Apostle, were particularly zealous in their efforts to persuade youth not to follow the footsteps of their parents in this regard. Smith felt that it was disgraceful for any man younger than thirty-five years of age to use tobacco,²² while the Church President expressed his view on young tobacco users in the following manner:

If the 'old fogies' take a little tobacco, a little whisky, or a little tea and coffee, we wish you boys to let it alone, and let those have it who have long been accustomed to its use. It is far better for these my brethren, who are young and healthy, to avoid every injurious habit. There are a great many boys here who are in the habit of chewing tobacco, they should stop it, and take no more, they are better without it. Some may turn round and say, 'Father, do you think so?' Yes, let the old folks have it, but you young, smart gentlemen, let it alone.²³

Did the Revelation Become a
Commandment in 1851?

Verse two of the Word of Wisdom states that the revelation was, "to be sent greeting; not by commandment or constraint, but by revelation and the word of wisdom showing forth the order and will of God in the temporal salvation of all saints in the last days." This verse has given rise to various interpretations, and through the

²²George A. Smith, Sermon of August 2, 1857, JD, V, 111.

²³Brigham Young, Sermon of April 8, 1855, JD, II, 271. For other references by Young and Smith stressing youth adherence during this time see: Journal History, March 31, 1855; George A. Smith, Sermon of April 8, 1855, JD, II, 362-364.

years differing opinions regarding the "binding nature" of the revelation have been expressed. Some have declared that although technically it cannot be construed as an absolute law, it should be observed because it represents the word and will of Deity.²⁴ Others have suggested that it is a commandment and has been since it was first revealed, stating that an expression of God's will is in reality a commandment.²⁵ Most Church Authorities, however, are of the opinion that when first given, the Word of Wisdom was not a commandment, but was later made one. Joseph F. Smith, fifth President of the Church, felt "the reason . . . why the Word of Wisdom was given not by commandment or constraint was that at that time . . . it would have brought every man, addicted to the use of these noxious things, under condemnation." He reasoned that a merciful God would give individuals a chance to overcome undesirable habits before bringing them under law.²⁶

²⁴ Copy of a letter addressed to Harley K. Fernelius, April 22, 1932, HDC. The writer's name was not given but the style would suggest that it was Andrew Jenson, Assistant Church Historian. Jenson held that the revelation would have to be modified to become a commandment in the strictest sense.

²⁵ See for example Heber J. Grant's comment in James R. Clark (ed.), Messages of the First Presidency (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965), V, 301.

²⁶ Conference Reports, October, 1913, p. 14, published semi-annually by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

It is sometimes said that at a General Conference meeting held on September 9, 1851, Word of Wisdom observance was made obligatory upon Church members. Here Brigham Young called on all the sisters who would refrain from using tea and coffee to manifest it by raising their right hand. He then asked "boys under ninety" to abstain from tobacco and whiskey and other undesirable items mentioned in the revelation. Apparently both notions were unanimously agreed upon.²⁷ A letter sent from the First Presidency to the Saints abroad explained this action in the following manner: "The Conference voted to observe the Word of Wisdom and particularly to dispense with the use of tea, coffee, snuff, and tobacco, and in this thing as well as many others, what is good for the Saints in the mountains, is good for the Saints in other places"²⁸

The many references to this particular event often leaves the impression that the Word of Wisdom was made a commandment at the time. Wilford Woodruff, an Apostle, recorded that the Saints voted to discontinue the use of tea, coffee, and tobacco in September Conference of 1851.²⁹

²⁷Journal History, September 9, 1951.

²⁸Clark, Messages of the First Presidency, II, 90.

²⁹Matthias F. Cowley, (ed.), Wilford Woodruff: History of His Life and Labor (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1964), p. 348.

Samuel H. Rogers, a Church member, noted that the membership of the Church was asked to live the Word of Wisdom at this time.³⁰ Later references by Church leaders which infer that Brigham Young made it a commandment in 1851, include statements by Angus M. Cannon in 1883,³¹ Brigham Young Jr. in 1895,³² Matthias F. Cowley in 1904,³³ and Joseph F. Smith in 1908.³⁴ In 1956 Joseph Fielding Smith wrote a reply to the question, "Has the Word of Wisdom ever been presented to the Church as a commandment making its observance obligatory upon the members of the Church?" Elder Smith stated:

The simple answer to this question is yes, such has been given and repeated on several occasions. On September 9, 1851, President Brigham Young stated that the members of the Church had had sufficient time to be taught the import of this revelation and that henceforth it was to be considered a divine commandment. This was first put to vote before the male members of the congregation and then before the women and by unanimous vote accepted.³⁵

Despite such numerous statements, a close perusal of sermons by various authorities in the 1850's and 1860's would lead to another conclusion. It is clear that the Word of Wisdom did not become obligatory upon Mormons at this time and more evidence for this will unfold later.

³⁰Samuel H. Rogers, "Journal of Samuel H. Rogers," pp. 144-145, copy located in the Special Collections Library, Brigham Young University.

³¹Journal History, November 3, 1883.

³²The Millennial Star, LVII (February 7, 1895), 82.

³³The Improvement Era Salt Lake City, VII (March, 1904), 366.

³⁴Conference Reports, April, 1908, p. 15.

³⁵The Improvement Era, LIX (February, 1956), 78.

A later "acceptance date" seems more logical for the following reasons: (1) Brigham Young himself did not strictly live the Word of Wisdom until the early 1860's. For example, Jules Remy, an English traveler, observed Brigham preparing "a quid of Virginia tobacco" in late September, 1855,³⁶ and in 1862 the Mormon President alluded strongly to the fact that he had recently overcome habits contrary to Word of Wisdom teachings.³⁷

(2) Young said as late as 1861 that he never chose to make observance to the Word of Wisdom a test of Church fellowship.³⁸ (3) The Mormon reformation of 1856-1857 was characterized by sermons advocating a return to a more strict adherence to Christian principles. During this period, a type of inquisitional catechism was formulated to provide an index to a Mormon's faithfulness. The only question having to do with the Word of Wisdom was an inquiry concerning whether or not an individual had been drunk.³⁹ The inference is obvious.

³⁶Remy and Brenchley, Journey to Salt Lake, Vol. 1, p. 202.

³⁷Deseret News, October 15, 1862.

³⁸Brigham Young, Sermon of April 7, 1861, JD, IX, 35.

³⁹Howard C. Searle, "The Mormon Reformation of 1856-1857" (unpublished Master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1956), pp. 61-62.

CHAPTER V

A PERIOD OF ECONOMIC ADJUSTMENT

By 1860, little if any progress had been made toward requiring more strict observance of the Word of Wisdom. Brigham Young's rather tolerant exhortation to tobacco users seemed quite consistent with prevailing sentiment:

Many of the brethren chew tobacco, and I have advised them to be modest about it. Do not take out a whole plug of tobacco in meeting before the eyes of the congregation, and cut off a long slice and put it in your mouth, to the annoyance of everybody around. Do not glory in this disgraceful practice. If you must use tobacco, put a small portion in your mouth when no person sees you, and be careful that no one sees you chew it. I do not charge you with sin. You have the "Word of Wisdom." Read it. Some say, "Oh, as I do in private, so I do in public, and I am not ashamed of it." It is, at least, disgraceful to you to expose your absurdities. Some men will go into a clean and beautifully-furnished parlour with tobacco in their mouths, and feel, "I ask no odds." I would advise such men to be more modest, and not spit upon the carpets and furniture, but step to the door, and be careful not to let any person see you spit; or, what is better, omit chewing until you have an opportunity to do so without offending.¹

But within two or three years this rather lenient attitude toward offenders changed and an increased emphasis on a more rigid application became evident. At least two reasons for this change are apparent. (1) It would seem that around 1862 Brigham Young had curbed his own habits.

¹Brigham Young, Sermon of March 10, 1860, JD, VIII, 361.

In a talk given in October, 1862, he declared that he had been in the habit of using tobacco but had left it off. He had also quit drinking whiskey, tea, and coffee, and felt so much better that he recommended abstinence to others.² (2) The conditions of the Mormon economy made strict enforcement practical if not necessary. This consideration was probably the more powerful of the two, and deserves extensive treatment.

In 1959, Leonard J. Arrington published an article entitled "An Economic Interpretation of the Word of Wisdom," which presented the economic point of view for consideration but "not as a final interpretation."³ He explained the relationship between the increased emphasis on the Word of Wisdom and Mormon economic conditions in the following manner:

Separated as they were from the United States by over 1,500 miles of treeless plains, hounded as they had been by hating 'mobocrats,' it was necessary for the Latter-day Saints to develop and maintain a self-sufficient economy in their Rocky Mountain retreat. Economic independence was a necessary goal of the group and every program of the Church tended toward that end. Economic independence meant developing all the agricultural, mineral, and industrial resources of the community under proper (i.e. church) leadership for the purchase of machinery and equipment needed in building a prosperous commonwealth. There must be no waste of liquid assets on imported consumer's goods Saints who used their cash to purchase imported Bull Durham, Battle-Axe plugs, tea, coffee, and similar "wasteful" (because not productive) products were taking an action which was opposed to

²Deseret News Salt Lake City , October 15, 1862.

³ Leonard J. Arrington, "An Economic Interpretation of the Word of Wisdom," Brigham Young University Studies, Vol. 1 (Winter, 1959), p. 37.

the economic interest of the territory. In view of this situation, President Young came to be unalterably opposed to the expenditure of money by the Saints on imported tea, coffee, and tobacco. It was consistent with the economics of the time that he should have had no great objection to tobacco chewing if the tobacco was grown locally. It was also consistent that he should have successfully developed a locally-produced "Mormon" tea to take the place of the imported article. Something more permanent and productive than tea, coffee, and tobacco was wanted for the building of the Kingdom, in view of the limited funds at the disposal of the Saints.⁴

According to Arrington, the coming of the transcontinental railroad posed a particularly crucial problem for Church leaders. The desire "to escape absorption into the wider free-trading economy of the nation," necessitated among other things, a reduction of unproductive consumer imports such as tobacco and tea to a minimum in order to finance productive imports. The organization of Relief Societies and Schools of the Prophets in 1867 with their requirements specifying Word of Wisdom adherence figured prominently in this facet of Church policy.⁵

An examination of sermons by Brigham Young and other authorities lends strong support to Arrington's thesis. As early as 1861, Mormon leaders were concerned with the importation into Utah of Word of Wisdom items. George A. Smith would rather have disposed of tobacco entirely but stressed raising it rather than importing it.⁶ Daniel H.

⁴Ibid., pp. 43-44.

⁵Ibid., pp. 44-45.

⁶George A. Smith, Sermon of March 10, 1861, JD, IX, 68.

Wells agreed that tobacco, as well as tea, coffee, and whiskey were better off left alone but reasoned that if the Saints considered them necessary, they had better produce these items themselves.⁷ President Young also expressed great concern over the economic waste resulting from importing tobacco:

You know that we all profess to believe the Word of Wisdom. There has been a great deal said about it, more in former than in latter years. We, as Latter-day Saints, care but little about tobacco; but as "Mormons," we use a great deal. How much do you suppose goes annually from this Territory, and has for ten or twelve years past, in gold and silver, to supply the people with tobacco? I will say \$60,000. Brother William H. Hooper, our Delegate in Congress, came here in 1849, and during about eight he was selling goods his sales for tobacco alone amounted to over \$28,000 a year. At the same time there were other stores that sold their share and drew their share of the money expended yearly, besides what has been brought in by the keg and by the half keg. The traders and passing emigration have sold tons of tobacco, besides what is sold here regularly. I say that \$60,000 annually is the smallest figure I can estimate the sales at. Tobacco can be raised here as well as it can be raised in any other place. It wants attention and care. If we use it, let us raise it here. I recommend for some man to go to raising tobacco. One man, who came here last fall, is going to do so; and if he is diligent, he will raise quite a quantity. I want to see some man go to and make a business of raising tobacco and stop sending money out of the Territory for that article.⁸

⁷Daniel H. Wells, Sermon of September 29, 1861, JD, IX, 183.

⁸Brigham Young, Sermon of September 29, 1861, JD, IX, 35. George A. Smith also figured that \$60,000 was the approximate amount going out of the Territory each year for tobacco. See JD, IX, 68; Deseret News, January 22, 1862. On later occasions, Young estimated that the Saints had been spending \$100,000 yearly for tobacco. See JD, X, 202, and JD, XI, 140.

In 1863, Brigham Young suggested on several occasions that the Saints should raise tobacco or do without it.⁹ He gave similar advice to the Saints in June and October of 1865¹⁰ and the same theme was echoed with vigor during a General Conference held in April, 1867. Here Brigham Young, George A. Smith, and Wilford Woodruff all lamented the fact that Mormons were spending a good deal of money on "forbidden products."¹¹

While the economic motive was the major factor in bringing about an increased stress on Word of Wisdom observance, Brigham Young also stressed the spiritual side. "The spirit whispers to me," said Young in 1867, "to call upon the Latter-day Saints to observe the Word of Wisdom, to let tea, coffee, and tobacco alone, and to abstain from drinking spirituous drinks."¹² Moreover, one can sense after reading various conference addresses in 1867 that the Authorities were becoming preoccupied with the idea of more strict observance of the Word of Wisdom, rather than the notion of producing these products locally. Young's talks in particular, took on a tone of displeasure with nonobservers, as can be seen by his

⁹Brigham Young, Sermon of June 7, 1863, JD, X, 202; Deseret News, July 15, 1863.

¹⁰Brigham Young, Sermon of June and July, 1856, JD, XI, 114; Sermon of October 9, 1865, JD, XI, 140.

¹¹Brigham Young, Sermon of April 6, 1867, JD, XI, 349; George A. Smith, Sermon of April 7, 1867, JD, XI, 364-365; Wilford Woodruff, Sermon of April 7, 1867, JD, XI, 370.

¹²Brigham Young, Sermon of August 17, 1867, JD, XII, 118.

remarks directed at Bishops and other ecclesiastical leaders:

There are certain rights and privileges belonging to the Elders in Israel, and there are certain things that it is not their privilege to indulge in. You go through the wards in the city, and then through the wards in the country, and ask the Bishops- "Do you keep the Word of Wisdom?" The reply will be "Yes; no, not exactly." "Do you drink tea?" "No." "Coffee?" "No." "Do you drink whisky?" "No." "Well, then, why do you not observe the Word of Wisdom?" "Well, this tobacco, I cannot give it up." And in this he sets an example to every man, and to every boy over ten years of age, in his ward, to nibble at and chew tobacco. You go to another ward, and perhaps the Bishop does not chew tobacco, nor drink tea nor coffee, but once in a while he takes a little spirits, and keeps whisky in his house, in which he will occasionally indulge. Go to another ward, and perhaps the Bishop does not drink whisky nor chew tobacco, but he "cannot give up his tea and coffee." And so it goes through the whole church. Not that every Bishop indulges in one or more of these habits, but most of them do.¹³

In that same address, the Mormon President indicated that he did not have the right or privilege to drink liquor, tea, and coffee, or use tobacco, inferring that no one did.

Subsequent sermons and remarks indicate that Young's pointed admonitions influenced some Saints to curb Word of Wisdom infractions. In May, 1867, Church leaders journeyed to Southern Utah to meet with Church members in the St. George area and expressed satisfaction with the efforts of local residents to obey the revelation.¹⁴ By May, 1868, obvious improvement

¹³Brigham Young, Sermon of April 7, 1867, JD, XII, 27.

¹⁴John Taylor, Sermon of May 19, 1867, JD, XII, 48; Wilford Woodruff, Sermon of May 19, 1867, JD, XII, 13; Brigham Young, Sermon of May 26, 1867, JD, XII, 51-52.

had been made and Brigham Young noted his approval accordingly: "There is within a few years past a great improvement in this, observance of the Word of Wisdom so much that I very much doubt whether a tobacco spittle could be found upon the floor of this tabernacle after this congregation is dismissed."¹⁵

During the ensuing months, Church leaders continued to stress obedience to the revelation and Young's speeches regarding observance were characterized by a firm, if not invective spirit. In April, 1869, he observed that the Saints had been making progress but asked: "Are they going to continue or will they return to their old habits like the dog to his vomit, or like the sow that is washed, to her wallowing in the mire?"¹⁶ A month later Young warned offenders at St. George, that "the destroying angel will go through and waste Flesh without Measure."¹⁷

¹⁵Brigham Young, Sermon of May 10, 1868, JD, XII, 209. For other references noting improvement in Word of Wisdom observance during this time see: Brigham Young, Sermon of May 17, 1868, JD, XII, 218; George A. Smith, Sermon of April 6, 1869, JD, XIII, 21.

¹⁶Brigham Young, Sermon of April 7, 1869, JD, XIII, 2-3.

¹⁷Robert Glass Cleland and Juanita Brooks (eds.), A Mormon Chronicle: The Diaries of John D. Lee (San Marino, Calif.: The Huntington Library, 1955), II, 117-118. This statement was given during a Conference of the Southern Utah Mission. For other remarks stressing Word of Wisdom adherence on this occasion see James G. Bleak, "Annals of the Southern Utah Mission," typed copy located the Special Collections Library, Brigham Young University, p. 317; Matthias F. Cowley (ed.), Wilford Woodruff: History of His Life and Labor (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1964), p. 460.

Somewhat later he instructed the Saints, some of whom had apparently claimed it would kill them to go without tea, to "die and die in the faith," instead of "living and breaking the requests of heaven."¹⁸

Perhaps a partial explanation for the harsh tone of such sermons was the apparent inability of many Mormons to maintain a consistent standard. It seems as if a steady verbal barrage was necessary to keep them from slipping back into former patterns. It would appear, in fact, that some already had done so. For example, on October 30, 1870, Brigham Young indicated that tea and coffee sales were increasing among Church members.¹⁹ In November, 1871, Orson Pratt expressed regret that many Mormons remained unfaithful regarding Word of Wisdom,²⁰ while nearly a year later, Brigham Young Jr., an Apostle, stated that the majority of Saints disregarded the Word of Wisdom.²¹ In October, 1873, George A. Smith somewhat cynically remarked that not all of the tobacco sold in co-operative stores was being used to kill sheep ticks.²²

¹⁸Brigham Young, Sermon of May 6, 1870, JD, XIV, 20.

¹⁹Brigham Young, Sermon of October 30, 1870, JD, XIII, 277.

²⁰"Minutes of the Salt Lake School of the Prophets," November 25, 1871, HDC.

²¹Brigham Young Jr., Sermon of October 8, 1872, JD, XV, 193-195.

²²George A. Smith, Sermon of October 7, 1873, JD, XVI, 238.

Overcoming tobacco and liquor habits was no easy thing for many Mormons, and the various difficulties and problems they encountered as they sought to overcome their undesirable habits are vividly reflected in the minutes of meetings held for the Schools of the Prophets. These schools in actuality were forum meetings in which problems related to theology, church government, civic affairs, and economic matters were discussed. They were instituted in 1867, at least in part, for the purpose of solving anticipated problems caused by the approach of the transcontinental railroad. The major "School" was located in Salt Lake and branch "Schools" were established in principal settlements.²³ In the late 1860's overt concern with money outlay for personal consumption items such as tobacco and tea resulted in an eventual entrance requirement specifying adherence to the Word of Wisdom.²⁴ Since this rule was difficult for many to abide by, the Word of Wisdom was a much-discussed topic. A typical meeting included among other things, a reminder of the rule necessitating Word of Wisdom observance, types of confessions

²³ Leonard J. Arrington, Great Basin Kingdom, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), p. 245.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 250; "Minutes of the Provo School of the Prophets," April 18, 1868, April 27, 1868; "Minutes of the Salt Lake School of the Prophets," no date given, 1870-1874; "Minutes of the Parowan School of the Prophets," 1868-1872, pp. 2-3; Journal History, September 19, 1868, p. 1.

and or of rationalizations for infractions, and pious resolves.²⁵

By 1874, Brigham Young had commenced the United Order movement. The United Orders were logical outgrowths of the cooperative movement of 1868-1869.²⁶ The Orders had three major economic objectives. (1) Fight depression. (2) Cut down imports. (3) Slow the development of a market oriented economy.²⁷ More importantly, Church leaders hoped the system would result in greater unselfishness and relative equality among members.²⁸ The order established at St. George Utah became the model for numerous others throughout the territory.²⁹ Members of the Order agreed to be temperate, economical, and frugal in food and drink.³⁰ A circular issued by John Young containing suggestions on making these enterprises successful, stated that, "the frequent use of wine and spirituous liquors should, most decidedly, be avoided and the use of tobacco, particularly

²⁵"Minutes of the Provo School of the Prophets," August 18, 1868, December 29, 1868, January 26, July 13, 1869.

²⁶Arrington, Great Basin Kingdom, p. 323.

²⁷Ibid., p. 330.

²⁸Ibid., p. 323.

²⁹Ibid., p. 327.

³⁰James G. Bleak, "Diary of James G. Bleak," March 26, 1874, typed copy located in the Special Collections Library, Brigham Young University.

among our young men should be abandoned."³¹

Avoiding the frequent use of liquor was probably somewhat difficult for many St. George residents.

Recognizing that Southern Utah needed an economic boost, Brigham Young suggested in the early 1860's that the area manufacture wine.³² One reason was to provide wine for sacramental purposes,³³ but a more important function was to provide income for destitute Saints in Southern Utah.³⁴ Brigham Young gave instructions as follows:

"Have this wine made in but few places, say, three or four, for this southern country. At these points obtain the best available skill to manufacture the wine, and have it properly graded in quality. Then store it in oak barrels as far as possible, and preserve it for exportation, rather than for consumption."³⁵

Wine was produced in large quantities and became a common article of trade. Many Saints paid their tithing with wine and by 1887 the tithing office at St. George

³¹Ibid., April 11, 1874, p. 273; "Manuscript History St. George Stake," April 11, 1874, HDC.

³²Arrington, "An Economic Interpretation," p. 46.

³³Deseret News, June 22, 1864.

³⁴Arrington, "An Economic Interpretation," p. 46. Apparently wine making was encouraged in Southern Utah throughout Brigham Young's administration. See: James G. Bleak, "Diary," March 26, 1874, p. 243.

³⁵James G. Bleak, "Diary," Book B. March, 1874, p. 253.

had over 6,000 gallons of wine on hand.³⁶ Much of the wine was of poor quality and the sale of inferior wine damaged the reputation of this product. This, plus the personal degradation of individual Saints, convinced Church authorities that the promotion of this industry had probably been a mistake.³⁷ By 1900, Church members were counseled to dig up their vineyards.³⁸

The fact that Church leaders approved and encouraged the manufacture of wine in Southern Utah is indicative of their pragmatic attitude toward the Word of Wisdom. Indeed, while admittedly, many of Brigham Young's sermons of the late 1860's seemingly bordered on demanding complete abstinence, one must conclude that Word of Wisdom considerations during this period were secondary to the building up of the "Kingdom" on a sound economic basis. The First Presidency's instructions to St. George United Order leaders in 1874 concerning tobacco culture reflected this sentiment: "Inasmuch as some continue the use of tobacco, and as it is good for sick cattle, and planted in coddling moth, it is recommended that enough be raised to at least supply our own wants."³⁹

³⁶ Juanita Brooks, "St. George, Utah--A Community Portrait," Symposium on Mormon Culture held at Utah State University, November 14, 1952, p. 4.

³⁷ Andrew K. Larson, I was Called to Dixie (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1965), p. 349.

³⁸ Brooks, "St. George Utah," p. 4.

³⁹ James R. Clark, (ed.), Messages of the First Presidency (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965), II, 262.

To what extent then, was the Word of Wisdom obeyed by members of the Church in the 1860's and 1870's? The observation of one prominent woman, Emily Dow Partridge Young, infers that strict adherence was not common:

Do we as a people realise the importance of those precious words. Do we accept them as the word of God unto us. Are they observed by this people as they should be. Could we find fifty Latter-day Saints in the Territory who abstain from tea, coffee, whiskey and tobacco or considers that it is worth while to even give it a thought. Is it not high time to wake up and open our eyes and look about us. If the Lord had no purpose in giving the Word of Wisdom, why did he take the trouble to give it. And if it is not necessary for us to observe it, what is the use of having it. Do we not know that all stimulants taken into the stomach are unhealthy. We see our little ones swept from our midst, one here two there, and four and five of one family stricken down one after the other with this dreadful diptheria. Do we realise that there is a cause and also a remedy for these things. Does not common sense tell us that there little bodies are charged with impurities I do not address the ladies because I think the remedy lays altogether with them. No. The gentlemen are more culpable, they take for more poison into their systems than the women. I have heard of one or two woman who drink whiskey to excess. And it may be that a few old ladies smoke their pipes; but I have seen nothing of the kind for years; and as to chewing tobacco (the worst poison of all) I do not think one ladie can be found in our whole community that indulges in the filthy . . . practice. Of course it is not our province to teach the elders their duty but we can plead and impertune with them; but if they will persist in poluting with these filthy poisons, the Lord may find a remedy they think not of.⁴⁰

In connection with Sister Young's comment, observations made by non-Mormon visitors regarding Word of Wisdom

⁴⁰ Emily Dow Partridge Young, "Diary of Emily Dow Partridge Young, March 25, 1877, p. 10, copy located in the Special Collections Library, Brigham Young University.

behavior are worth noting. Richard Burton, probably the most perceptive visitor ever to visit Mormondom, noted in 1860 that, "if the State [Utah territory] could make her own laws, she would banish 'poteen,' hunt down the stills, and impose a prohibitory duty upon everything s stronger than Lager-bier."⁴¹ Burton observed the following of Brigham Young: "Of his temperance and sobriety there is but one opinion. His life is ascetic He disapproves, as do all strict Mormons, of spirituous liquors, and never touches anything stronger than a glass of thin Lager-bier; moreover, he abstains from tobacco."⁴² William H. Dixon recorded in 1865 that "while abstinence from wine and tobacco is recommended by Young and taught in the Mormon schools . . . we found cigars in many houses, and wine in all, except in the hotels."⁴³ Like Burton, Dixon mentioned the difficulty one had in procuring liquor, and further observed that drunkards were always Gentiles.⁴⁴ In 1874, John Codman made comment that Mormons were temperate and that the use of tobacco was discouraged.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Richard Burton, City of the Saints (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1862), pp, 306-307.

⁴² Ibid., pp. 292-293.

⁴³ William Hepworth Dixon, New America (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1867), p. 207.

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 117-119.

⁴⁵ John Codman, The Mormon Country (New York: United States Publishing Co., 1874), pp. 6-7.

In summary, a consideration of the evidence would suggest the following: (1) Word of Wisdom observance was not mandatory during the 1860's and 1870's and Brigham Young never made it a test of fellowship. (2) A brief and possibly temporary improvement in adherence to the revelation took place in the late 60's and early 70's. (3) Mormons were temperate and moderate but not abstinent.

CHAPTER VI

AN ERA OF REPENTANCE AND REFORM: THE WORD OF WISDOM IN THE EIGHTIES AND NINETIES

Beginning in 1880, and lasting throughout the remainder of the eighties, a great prohibition wave swept the country. While only six states eventually emerged at the end of the decade with prohibition laws, a large number had submitted the issue in the form of constitutional amendments to be voted on by the people. The question of prohibition, in fact, figured prominently in the legislative sessions of three-fourths of the states and territories.¹

At the same time the prohibition issue was being hotly debated throughout the nation, the Mormon Church initiated in 1883 the most zealous, widespread, and probably most influential crusade to encourage Church members to obey the Word of Wisdom. While Mormon leaders were in all likelihood aware of and in accordance with the prohibition move of the eighties, it would appear that the movement had little connection with Word of Wisdom reform. More probably the increase in stress on the revelation grew out of specific problems and developments

¹Ernest H. Cherrington, The Evolution of Prohibition in the United States of America (Westerville, Ohio: The American Issue Press, 1920), p. 176.

within the Church.

Information provided in A. Karl Larson's book, I was Called to Dixie, suggests that this movement possibly had its origin in October, 1882. Larson noted that John Taylor, Young's successor as Church President, said that he had received a revelation on October 13, 1882, which designated the Word of Wisdom as a commandment.² Interestingly enough, Wilford Woodruff recorded in his journal that Taylor received a revelation in October of 1882, "in which the duties of the Priesthood and of the Saints were set forth."³ Whether these revelations were related is, of course, open to conjecture. If they were it would appear that, for some reason, Taylor did not initiate the reformation until approximately one year after the revelation had been received.

Just what was specifically included in President Taylor's revelation is unknown, but subsequent events suggest that reemphasis on the Word of Wisdom was but one area of concern. The concurrent reorganization of the

²Andrew Karl Larson, I was Called to Dixie (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1961), p. 607. Larson's source citation read: By a revelation through President John Taylor, October 13, 1882. This writer wrote Dr. Larson, desiring more precise information, and soon afterward received word that the original reference had been lost but most probably was found among papers in the St. George Temple.

³Matthias Cowley (ed.), Wilford Woodruff: History of His Life and Labor (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1964), p. 542.

School of the Prophets "in accordance with the designs of the Almighty,"⁴ and the stress on and increase in plural marriages⁵ infer that Taylor desired to bring about a series of general reforms. In short, one could refer to the 1883-1884 period in Church History as a "Second Reformation."

Probably one of the major reasons why the Word of Wisdom reformation of 1883-1884 was more successful than any preceding reform movement was that the presiding officers of the Church, more particularly the Quorum of Twelve Apostles, pledged themselves to observe the revelation. This action took place in a meeting called by President Taylor to discuss pertinent matters relative to the organization and functioning of the School of the Prophets, which the Mormon leader planned to reestablish in late 1883. At a meeting held on September 28, 1883, Wilford Woodruff, President of the Quorum of Twelve, declared:

I want to say to the First Presidency that we have been together as a quorum since this morning's meeting except for one hour. We have had a free and full talk upon our individual affairs-upon our family matters, upon the word of wisdom, the duties and responsibilities that devolve upon us as Apostles, etc. And we have come to the conclusion that we will more fully observe the word of wisdom, as we have all more or less been negligent upon that point.⁶

⁴"Minutes of the Salt Lake School of the Prophets," p. 3, located in the Historical Department of the Church, HDC.

⁵Stanley Ivins, "Notes on Mormon Polygamy," Utah Historical Quarterly, XXXV (Fall, 1969), p. 312.

⁶"Minutes of the Salt Lake School of the Prophets," September 28, 1883, p. 52.

Woodruff's sincere desire to improve in this aspect of his religion was evidenced by his remarks shortly afterward in October General Conference:

The Presidency were able to preach the whole law of God, and they practised what they preached. They were an example to others. No man in this kingdom had a right to preach that which he did not practice. He himself did not feel at liberty to preach the Word of Wisdom unless he observed it. In this respect the Apostles felt desirous of emulating the example of the First Presidency. But it should not stop here. All other quorums should do likewise, for the time was at hand when it would be necessary to keep the whole law of God, for there would be a dividing line, separating those who did from those who did not.⁷

Later meetings held in conjunction with the re-organization of the Schools of the Prophets demonstrated John Taylor's desire to make observance of the Word of Wisdom important if not binding. Prior to the actual organization of the Salt Lake School of the Prophets on October 11, 1883, various Stake Presidents expressed a willingness to live the Word of Wisdom.⁸ Joseph F. Smith, a member of the First Presidency, and Apostle Francis Lyman spoke to prospective members the next day, stressing the need for reform in this area.⁹ That same day, President Taylor expressed satisfaction at the zeal of the brethren regarding the Word of Wisdom and concluded that non-observers were not wanted in the "Schools."¹⁰

⁷Journal History, October 6, 1883, p. 8.

⁸"Minutes of the Salt Lake School of the Prophets," October 11, 1883, pp. 71-73.

⁹Ibid., October 12, 1883, pp. 81-91.

¹⁰Ibid., October 12, 1883, pp. 89-91.

Two months later a second School of the Prophets was organized in St. George and Church Authorities reiterated to prospective members that the Word of Wisdom must be obeyed. At a meeting held on December 23, 1883, Wilford Woodruff stated that the time had come for Church members to observe the Word of Wisdom.¹¹ Apostle George Teasdale observed that "Plural marriage and the Word of Wisdom were important principles to be observed, in order to stand in this Holy Order."¹²

The apparent ability of the majority of Church leaders to maintain consistency in living Word of Wisdom principles soon made itself manifest. The reformation had begun and the Word of Wisdom was preached with rigor everywhere. George Q. Cannon, while certainly aware of a need for reemphasis of the revelation, expressed disappointment that another crusade was necessary:

Considerable has been said of late--and especially during this conference concerning the Word of Wisdom. We confess to a feeling almost akin to shame at hearing this urged upon the Præsthood at this late date. Have we not had experience enough in the benefits which flow from the observance of these wise counsels of the Lord to observe these simple laws of health? It seems extraordinary that there should have to be so much preaching upon this subject, especially among men and women who have experience in the Church and in life. We can understand the necessity of teaching children upon this subject and dwelling upon its importance to them; but to be constantly having "revivals,"

¹¹"Minutes of the St. George School of the Prophets," December 23, 1883, HDC.

¹²Ibid.

as they may be termed, among the older members of the community seems to us a necessity which should not exist. Now we are having a little spurt of zeal upon this subject. Men bearing the Priesthood are resolving once more to keep the Word of Wisdom. They will probably urge their families to do so likewise. But how long will this last? Will the zeal die out after a little and they drop back into the old habits until another spurt of zeal takes possession of them? This has been the case in the past. We would like for the sake of Zion that this may be a permanent reform, and that, at least among the Priesthood, there will be no further occasion to make new resolves upon this subject. It seems worse than child's play to be constantly making resolves in this direction and constantly breaking them. The Word of Wisdom ought either to be obeyed or not to be obeyed.¹³

Cannon's sense of frustration was probably somewhat alleviated when General Authorities, Stake Presidents, and Ward Bishops began reporting successes. Matthias Cowley indicated that Box Elder youth were making much improvement in November, 1883,¹⁴ while Bishops in the Eastern Arizona Stake noted in December that their respective wards were more fully living the Word of Wisdom.¹⁵ Cannon himself stated at Weber Stake Conference held in January, 1884,

¹³Juvenile Instructor, XVIII, (October, 1883), p. 312.

¹⁴Journal History, November 21, 1883, p. 7

¹⁵Journal History, December 9, 1883. Other references which indicate a re-emphasis on the Word of Wisdom in 1883 are found under the following dates in Journal History: October 21, October 28, November 4, November 7, November 11, November 18, November 25, December 4, December 9, December 16, December 23, December 30. See also Lorenzo Hill Hatch, "Journal of Lorenzo Hill Hatch," November 5, 1883, p. 136, copy located in the Special Collections Library, Brigham Young University.

that the improvement in Word of Wisdom observance was noticeable,¹⁶ and Wilford Woodruff during Wasatch Stake Conference held the following month, referred to "the marked disposition on the part of the Saints, of late to keep the Word of Wisdom."¹⁷ That same month President A. H. Cannon alluded to the crusade in the following manner:

There is a reformation at the present among us, which is not causing such a great noise or furore but it is a silent reformation, a gradual cleansing and purifying. I allude to the Word of Wisdom. It is noticeable among the Saints in the various settlements. It was high time that such a reformation was taking place.¹⁸

The reformatory spirit engendered by the "Word of Wisdom" campaign died out by October, 1884, but up to that time, a stress on "Word of Wisdom" principles was much in evidence. Mrs. Zina Smith noted during a Relief Society Conference in March, 1884, that "she could feel the spreading work of the Word of Wisdom . . . ,"¹⁹ while a Sister Clawson stressed the importance of Primary children learning the "Word of Wisdom" song in June.²⁰ William Budge noted in August the "increase of sobriety and temperance, and the

¹⁶Ibid., January 20, 1884, p. 6

¹⁷Ibid., February 2, 1884, p. 6.

¹⁸Ibid., February 24, 1884.

¹⁹Ibid., March 13, 1884, p. 8.

²⁰"Minutes of Conferences of Primary Associations of the Salt Lake Stake," June 25, 1884, p. 55, HDC.

observance of the Word of Wisdom" among Saints in the Bear Lake Stake,²¹ and President John Taylor insisted the newly-called High-Council members of the Bannock Stake live the Word of Wisdom.²² On this occasion Taylor referred to the revelation as being obligatory on all officers of the Church.

Curiously enough, there are relatively few references to the Word of Wisdom between 1885 and 1893. This void can be accounted for in part by the polygamy persecutions and federal raids which were prevalent during this time. After the anti-bigamy act of 1862 proved unsuccessful in bringing about a cessation of plural marriages, Congress debated other means to handle the issue. The passage of the Edmonds Act in 1882, "put teeth" into the 1862 law and sought to eliminate polygamy by providing heavy penalties for offenders. In 1885, the Supreme Court upheld the Constitutionality of the law which led to systematic prosecution of Mormon leaders. Most prominent Mormons went "underground."²³ Obviously during such a period of

²¹Journal History, August 10, 1884, p. 5.

²²Ibid., August 17, 1884, p. 3. Other references noting a reemphasis on the Word of Wisdom during 1884, are found under the following dates in Journal History: January 15, January 27, February 3, February 9, March 1, March 9, March 16, March 24, March 30, April 19, July 15, August 18, October 4.

²³Leonard J. Arrington, Great Basin Kingdom (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), pp. 356-359.

stress it is to be expected that emphasis on the Word of Wisdom would be secondary to more pressing considerations.

The few references that were made to the revelation in the late 1880's and early 90's indicate that despite the obvious improvement made by many Saints in curbing Word of Wisdom infractions, Church leaders were sometimes annoyed by occasional abuses. At April Conference, 1886, the First Presidency referred to those who officiated or participated in Temple functions, noting that it was "most inconsistent to carry in the smell of whiskey and tobacco."²⁴ In 1893 the general membership of the Church was chided for excessive use of tea, coffee, and tobacco.²⁵

The "lapse period" of the late 80's and early 90's ended in October, 1894, when Wilford Woodruff, now President of the Church, spoke forcefully to Church members regarding Word of Wisdom observance:

The Word of Wisdom applies to Wilford Woodruff, the President of the Church, and it applies to all the leaders of Israel as well as to the members of the Church; and if there are any of these leading men who cannot refrain from using tobacco or liquor in violation of the Word of Wisdom, let them resign and others take their places. As leaders of Israel, we have no business to indulge in these things. There may be things contrary to the Word of Wisdom that we indulge in, and that we think we cannot live without; if we cannot, let us die.²⁶

²⁴James R. Clark, (ed.), Messages of the First Presidency (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965), III, 51.

²⁵Journal History, August 19, 1893, p. 3.

²⁶Millenial Star [Liverpool, England], LVI (November 19, 1894), 736.

Woodruff approached this theme with little trepidation and was prepared to call any guilty member to repentance.

John Smith, Patriarch of the Church, was warned thusly:

. . . I have many good sisters come to me and say President Woodruff, I have been raised on Tea and coffee, and if I do not have it I will be sick, I can not get along without it or I will die. And what have I said to them, Better die and keep the commandments of the Lord than to live and break them and here I see the Presiding Patriarch of the Church close to me,, if he can not keep the word of wisdom and the commandments of God, we will have to get another patriarch of the church. If he can not put away his tobacco and smoking he better resign. If he things those things are of greater value than the Holy Spirit, Brother John Smith you better resign and we will get some one who will keep the commandments of the Lord. You better throw away your pipe and liquor habits and keep the commandments of the Lord, and give way to some one who will honor that calling We want men who honor their calling and keep the commandments of the Lord to occupy positions of trust and not those who do not live worthy of the blessings of the Almighty. And this must be so.²⁷

In that same Conference, Heber J. Grant, a young Apostle, advised male members who think "more of a cup of tea or coffee, or a cigarette, or a chew of tobacco," than their Priesthood to resign their Priesthood.²⁸

The next few years were characterized by occasional but firm declarations by Church leaders to adhere to the Word of Wisdom, and clarifications on some of the finer points of the revelation. In February, 1898, the Deseret Sunday School Union Board suggested Word of Wisdom

²⁷ John M. Whitaker, "Journal of John M. Whitaker," October 1, 1894, pp. 67-68, HDC.

²⁸ Journal History, October 6, 1894, p. 12.

offenders not be selected superintendents and teachers in Mormon Sunday Schools.²⁹ In May, 1898, the First Presidency and some of the Apostles met in the Temple to discuss enforcement of the Word of Wisdom. As reported in the Journal History of the Church:

The subject of the Word of Wisdom and its strict enforcement was brought up for discussion, Pres. L. Snow having raised the question whether Bishops were justified in refusing to give members of the Church recommends to the Temple because they did not observe the Word of Wisdom. Brother J. H. Smith inquired what was meant by hot drinks. President J. F. Smith said it was defined by Hyrum Smith in the Times and Seasons; also that he (Bro. Smith) had heard President Brigham Young say that at the time the revelation on the Word of Wisdom was given prominent men in the Church were inveterate tobacco users and tea and coffee drinkers and that it was because of those practices that the Word of Wisdom was given. President L. Snow read the revelation on the Word of Wisdom and drew special attention to that part which relates to the use of meats, which he considered as that which relates to the use of liquors and hot drinks. He also referred to the revelation which says that he forbids the use of meat is not of God. He went on to state that President Taylor had expressed the view that some of the brethren talked too strongly against the drinking of tea and coffee. Brother Snow said he was convinced that the killing of animals when unnecessary was wrong and sinful, and that it was not right to neglect one part of the Word of Wisdom and be too strenuous in regard to other parts. President Woodruff said he regarded the Word of Wisdom in its entirety as given of the Lord for the Latter-day Saints to observe, but he did not think that Bishops should withhold recommends from persons who did not adhere strictly to it.³⁰

The tone of this meeting suggests that the specific

²⁹ Juvenile Instructor, XXXIII, (February 1898), p. 124.

³⁰ Journal History, March 11, 1898, p. 2.

guidelines which govern "Word of Wisdom" obedience today had not quite been formulated by that time. Certainly Snow's conviction that the portion of the revelation dealing with meat-consumption should receive equal consideration with the partaking of forbidden drinks has never been accepted as Church policy. President Snow's reference to John Taylor's alleged opinion on the brethren speaking too harshly against the drinking of tea and coffee seems somewhat inconsistent with previous statements made by the Mormon President, unless it was meant to imply that Taylor considered the evils or problems associated with tobacco and liquor to be much weightier than those connected with tea and coffee. Lastly, it is interesting to observe that despite Wilford Woodruff's 1894 denunciatory remark concerning Saints who fell short of observance, he chose not to withhold recommends from those falling short of absolute obedience.

Summary

A considerable improvement in Word of Wisdom observance took place during the 1880-1900 period. The most influential and far-reaching crusade to curb abuses occurred in 1883 and 1884 under the leadership of John Taylor. A contributing factor to the success of this reform period was the united effort exhibited by Church leaders themselves, to observe the revelation. Wilford Woodruff, a firm advocate of abstinence after 1883, stressed

the importance of Church members living the Word of Wisdom and in 1894, suggested that leaders and officers resign their Church positions if they fell short of obedience to this standard. Evidence would suggest that by 1900, a majority of Church leaders, including those on the local level, obeyed the revelation.

CHAPTER VII

THE WORD OF WISDOM AND THE ADOPTION OF PROHIBITION

Joseph F. Smith, Mormon Prophet from 1845 until 1890, was probably as strict with regard to Word of Wisdom observance as any of his predecessors and a brief review of his early statements on the issue suggest that he sought to draw additional guidelines to govern observance of the revelation. In 1845 he stressed that "tea and coffee were to be interpreted as hot drinks--not pepper, ginger and other such things which people were referring to in rationalizing their drinking of tea and coffee."¹ A year later he criticized some of the excuses wayward Saints were using to justify laxity in living the Word of Wisdom. He said that some people saw no evil in drinking tea and coffee because these items were not specifically mentioned in the revelation, while some Seventies and Elders condoned non-observance of the Word of Wisdom because the revelation was given for the benefit of the Council of High Priests.² In October, 1846, the Mormon leader

¹Journal History, October, 1845, located in back section of volume.

²Ibid., September 2, 1846, p. 4.

wrote John Hess, a Stake President at Farmington, Utah, in answer to an inquiry regarding the granting of recommends to Church members who did not observe the Word of Wisdom. President Smith advised Hess to: (1) Use his own discretion in most cases (2) Refuse recommends to flagrant violaters (3) Work with those having weaknesses (4) Be somewhat liberal with very old men who had contracted the tobacco habit but insist that they refrain from using tobacco those days they are in the temple. (5) Draw the line on drunkenness.³

President Smith might have stressed Word of Wisdom obedience even more had it not been for the fact that he had to spend a good deal of his time in defending the Church from outside attacks. The early years of his administration were characterized by numerous criticisms of the so-called evils within the Mormon system. Thomas Kearns, a non-Mormon Senator from Utah, had condemned Church leaders as monarchial and monopolistic, and the anti-Mormon "American Party" was formed to combat alleged Church interference in political affairs. Several widely circulated magazines denounced everything about Mormonism, including polygamy, which was still a sensitive issue.⁴

³Letter from the First Presidency to John Hess, HDC.

⁴James B. Allen, and Richard O. Cowan, Mormonism in the Twentieth Century (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1969), pp. 18-22.

The Salt Lake Tribune was a leading vehicle of anti-Mormon sentiment, and over-all the public image of the Church was far from positive.

At the same time the Church was endeavoring to correct these non-Mormon misconceptions, the prohibition issue once again came into focus both nationally and locally. While the prohibition movement provided an excellent chance to teach Word of Wisdom principles within the larger framework of prohibition reform, it came at a time when Mormon-Gentile relations were strained. Many Church leaders, leery of more negative exposure, were probably reluctant to involve themselves in so sensitive an issue.

It must have been obvious to Church Authorities during the early years of the Twentieth Century that the successes of the nationwide prohibition forces would eventually lead to prohibitory legislation. The Anti-Saloon League was organized and operating effectively in most states and other temperance organizations were influential in campaigning for statewide prohibition.⁵

Locally, neither political party had made prohibition a major political issue until 1908. By that time the popular support for a prohibition law influenced both Republicans and Democrats to take an active interest in

⁵Ernest H. Cherrington, The Evolution of Prohibition in the United States of America (Westerville Ohio: American Issue Press, 1920), p. 277.

such legislation.⁶

It was expected that the Mormon Church with its stand on "strong drinks" would be a major force in the push for statewide prohibition, and it was not surprising that Church leaders chose to emphasize the Word of Wisdom during the 1908 General Conference sessions. At April Conference, Joseph F. Smith urged observance of the revelation and other speakers stressed the same theme.⁷ Francis R. Lyman told the membership of the Church that "the time has come when all Latter-day Saints should be held to a little stricter account" with regard to the Word of Wisdom.⁸ At General Conference held the following October the Word of Wisdom was the keynote theme. In the words of Elder George F. Richards, the spirit of this particular conference was "to create a sentiment among this people in favor of yielding more implicit obedience unto the word of the Lord; as pertains to the keeping of the Word of Wisdom."⁹ In his opening address President Smith remarked: "I am sorry to say that I do not believe there is another revelation contained in this book, the Doctrine

⁶ Bruce T. Dyer, "A Study of the Forces Leading to the Adoption of Prohibition in Utah in 1917," (unpublished Master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1958), p. 7.

⁷ Conference Reports, April 1908, pp. 4-9.

⁸ Ibid., April 1908, p. 15.

⁹ Ibid., October, 1908, p. 86.

and Covenants or another commandment given of the Lord that is less observed or honored than this Word of Wisdom, and that, too, by members and officers of the Church . . ."¹⁰ Following Smith's address, Elder Anthon H. Lund, a member of the First Presidency, indicated that the General Authorities were now insisting that individuals accepting positions in Wards, Priesthood Quorums, etc., live the Word of Wisdom.¹¹ George Albert Smith, an Apostle, provided a note of positive encouragement to Saints with Word of Wisdom weaknesses in his address by reporting that in the St. George Stake, (an area formerly plagued with some wine abuse) all members of the Stake Presidency, High Council, and Ward Bishoprics, with two exceptions, were living the Word of Wisdom.¹²

While the Word of Wisdom was the obvious theme of October General Conference, it was somewhat puzzling to some that at a time when prohibition was being hotly debated, no specific pronouncement was made regarding that question. Though many Authorities spoke in favor of temperance or abstinence, the lack of precise reference to prohibition suggested to some that the Church was not openly in favor of statewide prohibition. In fact, the

¹⁰Ibid., October, 1908, p. 5.

¹¹Ibid., October 1908, p. 11.

¹²Ibid., October, 1908, pp. 84-85.

Salt Lake Tribune indicated that the reluctance of Mormon leaders to openly declare their support for prohibition during October General Conference inferred that they desired an alternate plan.¹³ Whatever the case, although an apparent majority of citizens in Utah favored some type of prohibition in 1908, the desired laws were not passed.¹⁴

The statewide prohibition controversey was dormant for some years following the spirited legislative sessions of 1908 and 1909, and it was not until 1915 that the Utah legislature once again came to grips with the issue.¹⁵

After a long struggle, Governor Spry, an active Mormon, surprised many by vetoing the Wootton Bill, thus killing any hope for a prohibitory measure.¹⁶ Soon afterward State Senator William Seegmiller claimed Spry acted in accordance with the wishes of Joseph F. Smith.¹⁷ The "Seegmiller statement" came during General Conference in April, 1915, and response from Smith was interesting. While not denying Seegmiller's claim, the Mormon leader stated that he had never relaxed his advocacy of prohibition.

¹³ Salt Lake Tribune Salt Lake City , January 17, 1909.

¹⁴ Dyer, A Study of the Forces," p. 46.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 69-87.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 88-107.

¹⁷ Deseret News, Salt Lake City, April 2, 1915.

and predicted that Utah would soon enter prohibition ranks.¹⁸

Notwithstanding the fact that Smith had, on previous occasions, declared his desire for statewide prohibition,¹⁹ his reluctance to comment specifically on prohibition issues during General Conference sessions have led some to conclude that his ambivalence was due to a fear that direct Mormon entrance into the controversy would deepen Mormon-Gentile wounds and result in a renewal of anti-Mormon agitation.²⁰ Certainly there can be little question that the Mormon President, like the majority of Church Authorities, desired state-wide prohibition, viewing the measure as a progressive step forward in helping people comply with what he considered to be a divine code of health.

Although Smith never chose to comment often on prohibition, his statements on the Word of Wisdom would suggest that he was moving the Church slowly but steadily in the direction of complete abstinence. In 1909 President Smith was asked by Bishop William A. Seegmiller of Kanab, if tobacco habits should constitute a basis for withholding recommends. Seegmiller was advised that all Mormons should

¹⁸ Conference Reports, April, 1915, p. 139.

¹⁹ Improvement Era, XIV (June, 1911), p. 735; Deseret News, June 6, 1914.

²⁰ Dyer, "A Study of the Forces," pp. 103-104.

live the law but some lenience should be extended to elderly people in some instances.²¹ In 1913, the First Presidency instructed Nephi L. Morris, President of the Salt Lake Stake, not to call or recommend young men for missions unless they observe the Word of Wisdom.²²

By the close of Joseph F. Smith's administration prospects for increasing Church-wide obedience were bright. State-wide prohibition had come in 1917, abstinence rather than merely temperance was probably the rule among Ward and Stake leaders, and most Mormons had come to accept compliance to the revelation as a tenet of their faith. In 1916, a comparative census of tobacco users among young male members in the St. George Stake indicated that in 1891, roughly 79 per cent of 428 questioned observed the Word of Wisdom, whereas in 1916, approximately 85 per cent of 827 polled, adhered to the revelation.²³ Progress had been made. Soon Word of Wisdom obedience would be to many outsiders, the most distinguishing characteristic of Mormon people.

²¹Letter from the First Presidency to Bishop William A. Seegmiller and Counselors, HDC.

²²James R. Clark, (ed.), Messages of the First Presidency, IV, 283.

²³Journal History, April, 1916, located in back section of volume.

CHAPTER VIII

THE WORD OF WISDOM: A STANDARD OF CHURCH ORTHODOXY

Heber J. Grant, President of the Church from 1919 until 1945, emphasized the Word of Wisdom with constant firmness and fervor. Under Grant's leadership the revelation came to be regarded as a binding principle, a test of individual obedience and worthiness, and a requirement for a temple recommend.

Determining precisely when Grant declared the Word of Wisdom to be binding is difficult, and many have maintained it was made obligatory before Grant's time. For at least three reasons however, it seems logical to believe that Word of Wisdom observance became a prerequisite for a temple recommend during Grant's administration. (1) Wilford Woodruff said in 1898 he did not believe in withholding recommends from Saints who did not strictly adhere to the revelation.¹ (2) Joseph F. Smith and other members of the First Presidency advised Stake and Ward leaders to work with those having Word of Wisdom weaknesses and to be liberal with elderly individuals.² (3) Grant

¹Journal History, March 11, 1898, p. 2, HDC.

²Letter from the First Presidency to John Hess, October 31, 1902, HDC; Letter from the First Presidency to Bishop William A. Seegmiller and Counselors, January 26, 1909, HDC.

obviously considered strict abstinence necessary and binding.³

Certainly Grant was a logical person to bring about a strict enforcement of the Word of Wisdom. As a young Apostle, he often spoke out against disobedience of it. Preaching year after year and seeing little improvement among the Saints was a frustrating experience for him and occasionally his apparent inability to inspire Mormons to curb their use of the items in question resulted in outright discouragement. He obviously was in such a mood when he uttered the following in 1894:

I confess to you, my friends and fellow-laborers in the cause of God, that I have been humiliated beyond expression to go to one of the Stakes of Zion, to stand up and preach to the people and call upon them to obey the Word of Wisdom, and then to sit down to the table of a President of a Stake, after having preached with all the zeal, energy, and power that I possessed, calling upon the people to keep the commandments of God, and to have his wife ask me if I would like a cup of tea or a cup of coffee. I have felt in my heart that it was an insult, considering the words that I had spoken, and I have felt humiliated to think that I had not sufficient power, and enough of the Spirit of God to enable me to utter words that would penetrate the heart of a President of a Stake, that he at least would be willing to carry out the advice which I had given. [I remember going to a Stake of Zion but a short time ago and preaching with all the energy I possessed and with all the Spirit that God would give me upon the necessity of refraining from the drinking of tea and coffee, and I heard also at that conference a very eloquent appeal to the Latter-day Saints by a man who, I understood, was a president of a quorum of Seventy. But when we came to take our meal, he jokingly said

³James R. Clark (ed.), Messages of the First Presidency (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965), V. 163.

that he could not do without his tea and coffee, and he proposed to have it and suffer the consequences. I remember going to another Stake of Zion and preaching to the people on the necessity of refraining from tea and coffee and giving some figures upon the wasting of the people's means; and the president of the Stake remarked, after I got through, that he thought the Lord would forgive them if they did drink their coffee, because the water in that stake of Zion was very bad. I did not say anything, but I thought a good deal, and I had to pray to the Lord and to bite my tongue to keep from getting up and doing something that I never have done in my life, and that is, to pick out a man and thrash him from the public stand. I felt that God owed me a blessing for not publicly reproving that man, because I wanted to do it so badly.

Now, I had made up my mind before I came to this conference that I would not open my mouth upon the Word of Wisdom. I have become so discouraged, so disheartened, so humiliated in my feelings, after preaching year after year both by precept and example, to realize that there are Bishops, Bishops' Counselors, Presidents of Stakes, and Patriarchs among the Church of God whose hearts I have not been able to touch, that I had about made up my mind that I would never again say Word of Wisdom to the Latter-day Saints. I felt that it was like pouring water on a duck's back.⁴

Grant however, did not let up, but, if anything, increased his devotion to the preaching the Word of Wisdom after assuming the mantle of Church leadership in 1919.

Concurrent with Grant's elevation to the Presidency was the beginning of the Prohibition era in the United States. Prohibition was a measure with Grant had diligently worked for and he frequently spoke out in favor of the experiment.⁵ Supporting prohibition and observing the Word

⁴Journal History, October 6, 1894.

⁵While a Church Apostle Grant was chosen as the National Trustee in Utah of the American Anti-Saloon League. See: Deseret News, January 6, 1909, p. 1.

of Wisdom both became frequent themes during his years as Church President.

Grant's desire to make Word of Wisdom obedience mandatory was manifest early in his administration. In October, 1919, the First Presidency instructed Mission Presidents not to send letters of recommendation for Temple recommends unless the individuals concerned were keeping the Word of Wisdom.⁶ In 1920, at a time when anti-tobacco sentiment was being distributed through organizations such as the "No-Tobacco League of America," the M.I.A. adopted a slogan which advocated the non-use and non-sale of tobacco.⁷ In 1925, Grant referred to Wilford Woodruff's declaration that Church office-holders must heed the Word of Wisdom or resign their positions, and stated further "that men who do not obey the Word of Wisdom are not worthy to stand as examples before the people, to be invited into private priesthood meetings, and to discuss matters for the welfare of the Church of God."⁸ At General Conference held in April, 1926, the Mormon leader expressed gratitude that the great majority of Latter-day Saints were living the Word of Wisdom and reiterated that all

⁶Journal History, June 10, 1928, p. 3.

⁷Conference Reports, October, 1920, p. 74. The slogan was, "We stand for the non-use and non-sale of tobacco."

⁸Ibid., April, 1925, p. 9.

presiding officers throughout the Church must adhere to the revelation.⁹ In 1928, President Grant spoke to workers in the Primary and Mutual Improvement Associations, urging them to "labor diligently . . . to persuade the youth of Zion to be more faithful . . . in observing . . . the Word of Wisdom."¹⁰

Grant's pre-occupation with Word of Wisdom adherence became even more pronounced in the late 1920's and early 1930's. This emphasis can be accounted for, in part, by the growing dissatisfaction with prohibition and the accompanying sentiment for repeal. By 1928, the difficulties encountered in enforcing prohibition had become obvious, and it was almost inevitable that the controversy would become a hotly debated election issue that year. Nationally, "wet" Al Smith campaigned against "dry" Herbert Hoover." Utahns gave Hoover a decided majority, although state results seemingly indicated that voters were not overwhelmingly in support of Prohibition.¹¹

By 1932, Prohibition as a political issue was reaching its climax. Utah voters gave the "wet" Democrats

⁹Ibid., April, 1926, pp. 5-6.

¹⁰Journal History, June 10, 1928, p. 3.

¹¹George Harmon Skyles, "A Study of Forces and Events Leading to the Repeal of Prohibition and the Adoption of a Liquor Control System in Utah," (unpublished Master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1962), pp. 15-20.

a resounding majority, and although the primary issue was the depression, there was little question that the forces favoring repeal had won a victory.

As expected, Mormon leaders opposed repeal sentiment. Although not all General Authorities were completely united on the repeal question, (B. H. Roberts, for one, was a notable exception)¹² the ardent prohibitionists among the authorities were the more vocal. Among the most outspoken was Richard R. Lyman who defended prohibition as a successful venture.¹³ At the 1932 October General Conference, Lyman and Joseph F. Merrill urged the Saints to support prohibition.¹⁴

By November, 1933, repeal and anti-repeal groups banded together for a final concerted effort in behalf of their respective cause. The five Latter-day Saint auxiliaries were among the dry organizations.¹⁵ The Church's newspaper, the Deseret News, and its most widely circulated magazine, The Improvement Era, strongly supported retention

¹²Letter from Brigham H. Roberts to Rudger Clawson, September 20, 1933, copy located in the Special Collections Library, Brigham Young University.

¹³Conference Reports, October, 1930, pp. 35-36.

¹⁴Ibid., October, 1932, pp. 39-55.

¹⁵Skyles, "A Study of Forces and Events," pp. 63-64.

of prohibition,¹⁶ and the frequency of anti-repeal utterances from Grant and leading officials increased as voting time neared.

With the completion of the November 7 balloting, the fate of the Eighteenth Amendment and the state prohibition amendment was sealed. Utahns voted for repeal by a considerable margin. Grant's disappointment must have been especially bitter, as Utah had the distinction of becoming the thirty-sixth state to ratify the repeal amendment, and thus was the final state needed to make it a law.¹⁷

Although Grant and other Church leaders were disappointed at losing the prohibition battle, their discouragement did not extend to Word of Wisdom matters. This was a battle they were winning and Mormon Authorities were not about to let up. Some two years before repeal, Grant replied to those who still continued to excuse infractions under the guise of the revelation not being a commandment:

I have met any number of people who have said the Word of Wisdom is not a command from the Lord, that it is not given by way of commandment. But the Word of Wisdom is the will of the Lord and the Lord says in the words that I have just read that it is not meet

¹⁶Deseret News, Feb. 3, 1933 p. 4, Feb. 21, 1933, p. 4; The Improvement Era, XXXVI (September, October and November Issues, 1933).

¹⁷James B. Allen and Richard O. Cowan, Mormonism in the Twentieth Century (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1969), p. 38.

that we should be commanded in all things. If you love your neighbor as yourself, if you love God with all your heart, might, mind and strength, does he need to command?¹⁸

That same year 100,000 Mutual workers convened in June Conference, declared themselves to "stand for Physical, Mental and Spiritual Health through observance of the Word of Wisdom."¹⁹ This theme was soon followed up on the local level, as all stakes and wards in the Church were asked to hold Word of Wisdom exhibits.²⁰

Grant's refusal to soften his verbal barrage occasionally resulted in criticism, and his replies to his detractors indicate his sincerity and devotion to his task. In 1932, the Mormon leader stated he had been called a crank for constantly urging the Saints to observe the Word of Wisdom, but mentioned that he expected to be a crank in that respect to the end of his life.²¹ The consistency and regularity with which Grant stressed the Word of Wisdom is reflected the following remarks made at General Conference held in October, 1935:

Today I appeal to you, each and all, to use your influence at home and abroad, to get the people to keep the Word of Wisdom, and I am going to read it. It

¹⁸Clark (ed.), Messages of the First Presidency, V. 301.

¹⁹Journal History, June 12, 1931, p. 3.

²⁰Ibid., October 17, 1931.

²¹Ibid., June 19, 1932, p. 2.

may be that it will be the fifty-third time in the past fifty-three years. I think that I have read it at least once a year if not a half a dozen times.²²

In 1937, President Grant told those who objected to hearing the Word of Word of Wisdom preached so often that "no mortal man who as a Latter-day Saint is keeping the Word of Wisdom is ever sick and tired of hearing it."²³

The greatest concentration of emphasis on the Word of Wisdom in the history of the Church came during the late Thirties and early Forties. During this period the Church expended considerable effort to promote it through literary means. In May, 1936, the first "Word of Wisdom Review," a monthly presentation of information pertinent to the Word of Wisdom, appeared in the Improvement Era. The "Reviews" ran monthly through February, 1940. In 1937, the First Presidency authorized the Quorum of Twelve to organize a campaign throughout the Church to combat "the increasing trend toward the use of alcohol and other intoxicating beverages, and to "conteract" cigarette smoking, particularly among the young people of the Church."²⁴ This was to be "the most thorough and complete anti-liquor tobacco crusade ever undertaken in

²²Conference Reports, October, 1935, p. 8.

²³Ibid., April, 1937, p. 13.

²⁴The Improvement Era, XL (December, 1937), 771.

the Church."²⁵ In conjunction with the campaign, an "Anti-Liquor Tobacco" column became a regular feature in the Improvement Era. Retitled "No-Liquor Tobacco" in February, 1941, this column appeared monthly until March, 1952. The "No Liquor-Tobacco" section informed readers of contemporary scientific developments which substantiated the Mormon position on tobacco and liquor, provided testimonials from noted individuals who felt abstinence contributed to their success as athletes, pilots, scholars, etc., and continually reminded Mormons of the blessings, both temporal and spiritual, which were predicated upon Word of Wisdom observance.

Among the most influential literary efforts associated with the Word of Wisdom have been the publications of John A. and Leah D. Widtsoe. In their extensive synthesis, "The Word of Wisdom: A Modern Interpretation," they claimed that latest nutritional developments confirmed Word of Wisdom truths, and suggested that individuals would experience health improvement or recovery by following the precepts outlined in the revelation.²⁶ The work was used as the Melchizedek Priesthood study course in 1938.²⁷

²⁵Ibid., XL (December, 1937), 771.

²⁶John A. and Leah D. Widtsoe, The Word of Wisdom: A Modern Interpretation (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1938), p. 5.

²⁷The Improvement Era, XL (December, 1937), 771.

Through the years and particularly during Grant's administration, there have been those who would broaden Word of Wisdom prohibitions according to a variety of personal interests or fads. Books such as The Word of Wisdom: A Modern Interpretation, for all their value, sometimes provide a basis for such extremists, especially for food fadists. Some individuals have claimed that true observance of the Word of Wisdom precludes white sugar, chocolate candy, etc. For example, a Mission President Joseph F. Merrill in 1934 that some Saints in his area suggested a fellow-member be disfellowshipped because he ate white bread.²⁸ Such people have been out of line with Church policy, and to them General Authorities have patiently replied that only alcohol, tobacco, tea, and coffee, are specifically prohibited. Widtsoe himself cautioned against "stretching the Word of Wisdom to conform with our own opinions."²⁹ A similar response was voiced by Bruce R. McConkie some years later who said:

Some unstable people become cranks with reference to this law of health. It should be understood that the Word of Wisdom is not the gospel, and the gospel is not the Word of Wisdom There is no prohibition in Section 89, for instance, as to the eating of white bread, using white flour, white sugar, cocoa, chocolate, eggs, milk, meat, or anything else, except items classified under the headings, tea, coffee, tobacco, and liquor.³⁰

²⁸ Deseret News, August 18, 1934.

²⁹ John A. Widtsoe, Evidences and Reconciliations (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1951), III, 155.

³⁰ Bruce R. McConkie, Mormon Doctrine (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), pp. 845-846.

Another area of sensitivity has to do with Cola drinks, which some people feel should be prohibited because they contain caffeine as does coffee. From time to time Church leaders have been asked to explain the position of the Church with regard to such beverages. Their replies have been consistent in three respects. (1) They advise against the drinking of Cola drinks because of the caffeine content. (2) They suggest that any drink or substance containing a habit-forming drug should be avoided. (3) They emphasize that the Church has never included Cola drinks within the actual prohibitions of the Word of Wisdom.³¹

In summary, by the end of the 1930's, Word of Wisdom adherence had become important and obligatory to almost all concerned Saints. Grant's incessant preaching to a generation largely unfettered with the undesirable habits of their forebears had taken effect. The Word of Wisdom had become an accurate criterion of Church orthodoxy and a distinctive characteristic of Mormon society. Several writers during this time observed that although Mormon exclusiveness had greatly diminished by the 1920's and 1930's, there still was little social interaction between Mormons and Gentiles, the principle reason being

³¹ Letter from Mark E. Peterson to a Brother Lloyd, March 22, 1949, HDC; The Improvement Era, LXVIII, (September 1968), 759; The New Era, II (May, 1972), 50.

the abstinence of Church members from tobacco and liquor.³² Such exclusiveness has continued through the years. Thomas O'Dea, a non-Mormon scholar who wrote a profoundly analytical work on Mormonism in 1957 concluded that:

. . . while the Mormons have never identified group membership with peculiarity of dress as sectarians have frequently done, the strict interpretation of Joseph Smith's no-liquor, no-tobacco counsel at the present day serves an analagous function and has become the focus of the expression of exclusivist sentiments.³³

Although the Word of Wisdom is no longer stressed as often as it was during Grant's administration, it still occupies a high priority level for faithful Mormons and one cannot advance in the Church, receive temple recommends, or hold positions of responsibility, without abiding by its precepts.

Modern Saints, though, probably have a more rational basis for obedience to the revelation than did Church members in former times. Recent scientific developments have demonstrated the soundness of Word of Wisdom doctrines, more particularly with regard to tobacco. In 1954 the American Cancer Society and the

³²Katharine F. Gerould, "Salt Lake: The City of the Saints," Harpers, CXLIX (June 19, 1924), 27; Richard O. Cowan, "Mormonism in National Periodicals" (Unpublished Doctor's dissertation, Stanford University, 1961), p. 123.

³³Thomas F. O'Dea, "The Sociology of Mormonism," Publications in the Humanities, No. 14, M.I.T., 1955, p. 8.

British Medical Research Council reported that death rates were higher for cigarette smokers than non-smokers. Some ten years later a committee appointed by the U.S. surgeon linked cigarette smoking with the increase in lung cancer, coronary artery disease, chronic bronchitis and emphysema. In 1965 federal legislation was passed requiring cigarette packages to carry health hazard labels, and more recently cigarette advertising has been banned from T.V. and radio.³⁴ Other lesser-known studies have contended that coffee and tea contain dangerous drugs, and the problems associated with alcohol consumption are obvious. Indeed, common sense concern for health while not supplanting faith, has become an additional reason for Latter-day Saints today to live the Word of Wisdom.

³⁴Robert E. Hair, "Tobacco and Disease," Encyclopedia Britannica, 1970, XXII, 46.

CHAPTER IX

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Joseph Smith, the founder of the Mormon Church, issued a health code in 1833, which advocated among other things, that alcohol, tobacco, tea, and coffee not be taken internally. Smith's views were not novel and some aspects of the code reflected contemporary American thought. To Mormons however, the important thing was that Joseph claimed to have received this knowledge by way of revelation, thus confirming what many had taught previously regarding the undesirability of such substances.

Since the revelation was given "not by way of commandment," it was to be expected that there would be a number of different responses. From the beginning, some viewed it as binding and desired to make observance obligatory, while others, agreeing that it was sound advice, did not feel that it should be used as a basis of Church membership. It is apparent that in the 1830's many did take the revelation seriously and considered compliance important. Considerable pressure was exerted upon Saints in many areas to abstain from alcohol, tobacco, tea, and coffee. One exception to this had to do with wine consumption, as it is evident that many Mormons did

not place wine in the "ardent spirit" category.

By the early 1840's there was a slackening of Word of Wisdom stress and observance. Nauvoo, originally almost a "dry-town," liberalized its laws regulating liquor control as early as 1841. During this time Church leaders occasionally cautioned the Saints about being narrow and intolerant with regard to those who had difficulty obeying the revelation.

Apparently Joseph Smith was not an advocate of strict compliance, and his actions and words suggest he leaned toward moderation rather than abstinence. Quite possibly the Prophet was more concerned with what he considered to be more significant matters pertaining to the growth of the "Kingdom," and sought to avoid the fanaticism that characterized sermons of some of the radical temperance reformers. At any rate, Joseph, while strongly opposed to intemperate actions, showed little concern with mild lapses and minor infractions.

Word of Wisdom observance reached a low ebb following the death of Joseph Smith in 1844. In planning their trek westward Mormons included tea, coffee and alcohol among their supplies. Apparently these items were regarded as staples by some Saints. This same laxity continued throughout the early harsh years of the settlement of the Great Basin, and it was not until the Saints were entrenched in Utah territory that any notable improvement took place. Obviously the hardships

associated with the colonization process outweighed Word of Wisdom considerations at this time.

A re-emphasis of the Word of Wisdom took place in the 1860's. Much of the motivation behind this increased stress was economic in nature, as Church leaders objected to the amount of money Mormons were spending to import items prohibited in Section 89. During the early years of this crusade Brigham Young and other Church leaders stressed local production of the products as much as they preached abstinence from them, but this emphasis changed later to concern with complete obedience. Brigham Young noted a general improvement with regard to Word of Wisdom observance during this era but the improvement was probably of no lasting consequence.

It appears that during the thirty years that Brigham Young presided over the Church, he gradually arrived at the conclusion that the Word of Wisdom must be lived. Realizing that older generations would have difficulty reforming, he directed many of his admonitions to the young. A detailed study of his talks and addresses suggests that the "appeal to youth" was not altogether successful, or at least that progress was extremely slow, and later sermons reflect Young's progressive determination to curb abuses by emphasizing that the revelation applied to all Mormons. Still it seems safe to assert that Brigham Young regarded Word of Wisdom observance as secondary to the paramount concern of laying the economic

foundations of the Kingdom. Young himself, was apparently a strict adherent after 1862, though he never made complete obedience a test of fellowship in the Church.

In 1883, under the administration of John Taylor, the most far-reaching and influential crusade up to that time to encourage Mormons to obey the Word of Wisdom began. The stress was strictly moralistic as Church members were urged to heed the revelation because God desired it and not because of economic pressure or health considerations. An important key to the success of this reformation lay in the unanimity of agreement expressed by Church leaders to lead out by setting the example of abstinence.

Wilford Woodruff, successor to John Taylor, was a strict adherent after 1883, and suggested, as had Taylor, that leaders and officers resign their Church positions if they fell short of obedience to this standard. Joseph F. Smith, President of the Church from 1901 until 1919, stated that the revelation was binding upon all members. Although all presidents up to and including Joseph F. Smith, occasionally stressed strict abstinence, none of them believed in withholding temple recommends from Saints with moderate weaknesses in this area.

President Heber J. Grant, Mormon Prophet from 1919 until 1945, evidently felt a need to preach obedience to this revelation as no other Church President had. While stressing that the Word of Wisdom was an absolute commandment, binding upon all Saints, Grant also appealed to

physical motives by emphasizing the health advantages one might accrue by adherence. Some have felt that Grant's preoccupation with the Word of Wisdom led to an over-emphasis of the revelation, often at the expense of more fundamental Christian virtues. Still, it must be admitted that his continual preaching to a new generation of Saints resulted in Mormons reaching a high level of obedience. During his administration almost all Mormons came to accept the revelation as a fundamental and necessary tenet of their religion.

There has been little change in direction regarding Word of Wisdom attitudes since President Grant's time. If anything, more recent emphasis on compliance with other standards of Christian living has resulted in the Word of Wisdom being stressed less often. Modern Research however, has lent greater credence than ever to a Mormon's belief in the divinity of the revelation, and the degree to which almost all active Church members have come to live the precepts contained in Section 89, have resulted in Word of Wisdom observance becoming quite possibly the most apparent characteristic of Mormon society in the Twentieth Century.

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AN HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE WORD OF WISDOM

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ABSTRACT

The Word of Wisdom was announced by Joseph Smith as a revelation from God in 1833. The revelation prohibited the use of alcohol, tobacco, tea, and coffee. Its pronouncement came at a time when temperance movements were conspicuous throughout America.

Interpretations and attitudes have changed toward the Word of Wisdom over the years. Before 1840 many Mormons considered abstinence important though Joseph Smith stressed moderation. Observance became lax as Mormons trekked westward to settle Utah territory. Brigham Young stressed obedience to the revelation in the 1860's but never made observance obligatory. Under John Taylor in 1883, a Word of Wisdom reformation began. Taylor stressed that Church officers should obey the revelation as did successors, Wilford Woodruff and Joseph F. Smith. None of them required rigid compliance for procurement of a Temple recommend. Heber J. Grant preached the Word of Wisdom with zeal and during his administration, strict observance became a criterion of orthodoxy. Attitudes have changed little since Grant's time and today Word of Wisdom adherence is a distinguishing characteristic of Mormon society.

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